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ABSTRACT

Kerala, a state in southwestern India, has implemented radical reform as a development strategy. As a result, Kerala now has some of the Third World's highest levels of health, education, and social justice. Originally published in 1989, this book traces the role that movements of social justice played in Kerala's successful struggle to redistribute wealth and power. A 21-page introduction updates the earlier edition. This book underlines the following positive lessons that the Kerala experience offers to developing countries: Radical reforms deliver benefits to the poor even when per capita incomes remain low. Popular movements and militant progressive organizations with dedicated leaders are necessary to initiate and sustain reform. Despite their other benefits, radical reforms cannot necessarily create employment or raise per capita income. Local reformers are restricted by national politics. Public distribution of food is a highly effective policy in poor agrarian economies. Devoting significant resources to public health can bring about low infant mortality, high life expectancy, and low birth rates even when incomes are low. Widespread literacy and educational opportunities can help create a more just and open social order. Meaningful land reform can reduce inequalities and give resources to the poor. Wage and working-condition laws can help effect more equitable resource distribution even in a poor economy. Greater socioeconomic equality can lead to lower levels of violence and a healthier social and political environment. Women can benefit from radical reforms not aimed at them, but special attention must eventually be given to their needs. Progressive forces, including Communist parties, can play a major positive role in benefiting very poor Third World citizens. Radical reforms can shield the poor against recessions. Contains over 200 references. (TD)

ED 400 149

KERALA

Radical Reform as Development in an Indian State

Richard W. Franke
Barbara H. Chasin

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KERALA: Radical Reform as Development in an Indian State

Richard W. Franke
Barbara H. Chasin

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The Institute for Food and Development Policy
Oakland, California

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KERALA

Map Indicates Historical Divisions Referred to in Report

SOUTH CANARA

MALABAR

WESTERN GHAT MOUNTAINS

Calicut

ARABIAN SEA

COCHIN

TRAVANCORE

N

Trivandrum

ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE 1994 PRINTING

The apparent recent victory of world capitalism and market economies poses severe challenges for the third world. While capitalism can produce a variety of consumer products and generate wealth for some, it is accompanied by problems, including growing inequality, that render it a highly questionable force for improving the lives of the world's poor. At present, there seem to be few viable alternatives for development that emphasize justice, environmental sustainability, and the empowerment of ordinary people. One possible alternative is the "Kerala Model," which we describe in this book.

Since the first printing of this book in 1989, Kerala and India have experienced both continuity and change. In this introduction, we shall update Kerala's most significant events and trends in approximately the order in which the main information is presented in the book.[1]

Kerala's Continuing Success

Since the 1986 data in our first printing, Kerala has continued to improve its quality of life indicators, staying far ahead of the rest of India and low-income countries world-wide. Table 16 provides 1991 statistics to update table 1, page 11, of this book. 1991 is the most recent year for which all the statistics are available.

We see from table 16 that Kerala has improved its per capita GNP at a rate faster than the all-India average. In 1986, Kerala's per capita GNP was 63% of the all-India average; in 1991 it had risen to 90%. This figure may reflect the improved ability of Kerala statisticians to collect information on the income from overseas, mostly Middle East Gulf states workers sending

TABLE 16: Comparison of Quality of Life Indicators, 1991

Indicator	Kerala	India	Low-Income Countries[a]	United States
Per capita GNP (in $)	[b]298	330	350	22,240
Adult literacy rate (%)	[c]91	52	55	96
Life expectancy (in years)	[d]69 72	60	55	76
Infant mortality (per 1,000)	[e]17	[f]85	91	9
Birth rate (per 1,000)	20	31	38	16

SOURCES: GOK 1993:8,9,91, 96,147; Bose 1991; World Bank 1993:238-39, 292-93.

a Low-income refers in 1991 to 40 economies with per capita GNP of $635 or less. With China and India excluded, it refers to 38 countries, almost the same as the 37 countries used in table 1 for 1986 data.

b We estimated the $ figure for Kerala by taking the ratio of the 1991 Kerala rupees figure against the national rupees figure and multiplying by the World Bank figure for the national GNP per capita which is given in $, presumably at the most appropriate exchange rate for that year.

c Kerala's adult literacy rate for 1991 is taken from the 1991 Indian Census, prior to the literacy campaign discussed later in this introduction. By the end of 1991, Kerala's rate was near 100%.

d We could not locate a combined life expectancy figure for Kerala. The figure 69 is for men, 72 is for women. The 1993 figure for women rose to 73 (Alexander 1994).

e Kerala's 1992 infant mortality rate was 16 (GOK 1994:18).

f Indian Government sources give infant mortality as 81 or 86 for 1991, while the World Bank lists it as 90. We use 85 as a compromise.

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remittances back to Kerala rather than a major increase in earning power of people inside Kerala. We shall discuss overseas workers later in this introduction.

Kerala's literacy rate improved by 13 points while India overall went up nine points. As we shall see below, Kerala has now achieved effective 100% literacy, up 21 points or 27%. Comparing table 1 with table 16, we see that Kerala's infant mortality rate dropped from 27 to 17 per 1,000 live births, a remarkable 37% decline. For India as a whole, infant mortality seems to have remained at the same level. Kerala's striking achievement in continuing to bring about a rapid decline in infant mortality can be partly explained by the medical, nutrition, and health data that we shall consider in the next sections. Overall, the data from Table 16 leave little doubt that the Kerala model continues to provide important benefits to its people even with continuing low per capita incomes.

Data are not available to update tables 2 and 3, but we can say that the data from table 16 above suggest that inequality in Kerala is lower than for the rest of India. Since the initial publication of this book, Richard W. Franke has published a study which verifies statistically for *Nadur* village in central Kerala that inequality declined in the period 1971 to 1986. This was a period in which many of Kerala's most significant reforms took place including the land reform, discussed in chapter 8 of this book, and the Kerala Agricultural Workers' Act and related measures discussed in chapter 9. The study also shows how the lives of the poorest villagers were improved by the reforms and the declining inequality. Readers wanting a close-up view of Kerala's development model may wish to consult *Life Is a Little Better: Redistribution as a Development Strategy in Nadur Village, Kerala* (1993). Readers wanting more detailed information on Kerala generally should read Robin Jeffrey's well-researched and well-written *Politics, Women and Well Being: How Kerala Became 'A Model'* (Oxford 1993).

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Food

The Nadur village study shows that school and nursery lunches added 3% to the incomes of the poorest households with children in school.[1] Beneficiary households also gained 5% more calories than without the lunches which become strategically most important to poor households in July near the end of the long lean season prior to the major August harvest[2]. Nonetheless budgetary pressures forced cutbacks of the program from 3 million students in 1987 (page 29 of this book) to 2.2 million in 1993[3].

Ration shops have also been under attack. Recent studies continue to find that Kerala's ration shops are the most effective in India in coverage of the population, convenience in location, hours open, and lack of corruption. The lack of corruption in particular is ascribed to Kerala's high level of citizen awareness and participation, corroborating our claims in chapter 5[4].

Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, however, India's national government began restrictions on subsidies for public food distribution. India's external debt in 1991 was $70 billion, 24% of the gross national product.[5] In 1993, food subsidies were 39% of the national budget deficit.[7] The Congress Party government of prime minister Narasimha Rao accepted World Bank-IMF demands to "target" food aid more "efficiently." One element in this targeting has been the idea that more well-developed areas in terms of quality of life—such as Kerala—need less food rationing so that more can be available to needier areas. Another element has been the gradual increase in the price of ration shop rice almost to the level of the open market. In 1993, subsidized rice purchases in Kerala declined by 9% from their 1992 level[8].

Nearly all discussions of ration shops in India are based on national or statewide statistics. To our knowledge, our research in Nadur village is among the few studies indicating what happens

at the village level. We found that the ration shop redistributes from the rich to the poor. When only the main ration shop good—rice—is considered, we find that the ration shop raises the effective incomes of the lowest 20% of the population by 10% and is crucial in terms of calories to their survival in the lean portions of the farming year.'

Nutrition

Kerala's nutritional paradox—which we discuss on pages 32-36—receives confirmation from the latest reports: Kerala's children continue to show the lowest food intake but the best height and weight figures among Indian states[10]. Based on research from other parts of the world, we suggested (page 36) that Kerala's mothers and infants may use their better health services to increase the efficiency with which they use the limited food they get. New studies seem to corroborate this idea. Prenatal and immediate post-natal care in Kerala are widely available and widely utilized. Pregnant women are better cared for and sick infants receive prompt medical attention. Furthermore, because of the high levels of education and awareness, Kerala mothers nearly always breast feed their children for at least the first six months[11].

Health

Table 16 shows that Kerala's life expectancy continues to remain very much above the all-India figure, so we must assume that general health facilities continue to be widely available. Kerala's rural hospital beds per 100,000 rose from 107 in 1980 (table 8 in this book) to 192 in 1990, a 79% increase. The all-India rate in the same period went from 12 to only 16, a 33% rise.[12] In the area of mental health, Kerala also stands out: with only 4% of India's people, Kerala in 1991 had 20 of the country's 61 mental hospitals[13].

Data recently published demonstrate how important health services have been in the decline of infant mortality in Kerala. A study in three Kerala districts revealed that pregnant women having a blood test and taking iron and folic acid supplements during pregnancy had a 36% lower rate of first year infant deaths than those not receiving such care.[14] Those receiving tetanus injections displayed a lower rate.[15] Those having their baby in the hospital—about 58% of all births in Kerala[16]—had rates 38% lower than those giving birth at home.[17] Kerala's child tuberculosis, polio, and DPT (diphtheria-pertussis [whooping cough]-tetanus) vaccination rates in 1992 were 100%. The all-India rate for DPT was 83%. For measles, Kerala's rate was 92%, compared to an all-India rate of 77%.[18]

The Kerala Morbidity Paradox

Kerala recently became the focus of an intense discussion of what at first seemed to be unexpected health findings: on illness surveys, Kerala's people seemed to be sick (have higher "morbidity") many times more often than people in the rest of India.[19] As Amartya Sen, one of India's most renowned economists argued, these data are hard to reconcile with the fact that Kerala's people live longer and the children are so much less likely to die.[20] In our view, the debate was resolved when it was noticed that by similar criteria, people in the U.S. are sick more often than those in Kerala.[21] Simply put, people with better access to health care report illnesses far more often than those who have no hope of seeing a doctor. Fevers, vomiting, diarrhea, severe headaches, pains in the muscles and joints, and the like can be considered part of normal living if you're poor. If you have money or if you have access to public medical services, you consider them diseases.

While setting aside the Kerala morbidity paradox as solved, we should not underestimate the seriousness of disease in Kerala. Stomach parasites and other diseases of underdevelopment still

take a heavy toll on the health and happiness of the state's people.[22] Farm laborers walk across Kerala's fields spraying pesticides that may be extremely harmful to those breathing the fumes as well as the intended insects.[23] Restaurant workers and housewives stand in front of fires that give off cancer-causing particulates. Blenders stir tobacco amidst fumes that surely contain unacceptable levels of nicotine. Occupational health and safety are virtually undeveloped in Kerala.

Kerala's Low Birth Rate

Kerala's low birth rate (pages 43-44) continues to attract attention. The most recent literature appears to confirm what has been shown in earlier studies: female education brings about the biggest decline in birth rates.[24] But several variables interact in ways that make it difficult to isolate a single cause. Our research in Nadur Village confirmed other studies showing that women going to school longer marry later.[25] Literate females are also thought to be more likely to learn about birth control techniques. In Kerala in 1992, the birth rate had dropped to about the replacement level.[26] Women of child-bearing age using some form of contraception rose from 36% in 1980 to 60% in 1990.[27] During this same period, female literacy rose from 76% to 87%.[28] Female literacy rose in a society with fairly dependable, accessible health services. Ability of children to survive, access of women to health care while pregnant, access to knowledge about contraception, access to contraception and follow-up care, etc., all interacted to produce lower birth rates. As we argue in chapter 12 of this book, Kerala's reforms are mutually reinforcing.

Helping Workers

Since 1989, Kerala has expanded its programs to help the lowest paid workers. Coverage of the agricultural laborers' pensions (pages 65-66) increased to 335,000, about 15% of the population above age 60. Kerala demographers and economists consider this to be full coverage of the aged agricultural laborer population.[29]

Slightly over half of those covered are women.[10] Our research in Nadur Village indicated that the poorest households were receiving all of the benefits from the pensions which added an average of 17% to their incomes. Among the lowest, former untouchable Pulaya caste, 91% received a pension. Even so, 38% of all pension recipient households reported a food shortage at some time during the year compared with 8% of households not receiving pensions.[11] In August 1991, the pensions were raised from 60 to 70 rupees per month.[12]

During the 1980s, Kerala also initiated programs to bring higher wages, better benefits, and stability to segments of the work force often neglected. One case is that of "headload workers." These casual day laborers load and unload trains, buses, and trucks, and carry loads in urban and rural areas over large distances. Headload employers have great advantages over their workers. Individual disputes between workers and employers often lead to violence. The 1980 *Kerala Headload Workers' Act* authorized the government to set up *Headload Workers' Committees* across the state to resolve these problems. The committees are made up of workers, employers, and government representatives. Employers hire workers from the Committee, which collects the wages and pays the workers.[13] The committee deducts 10% of wages and takes a 25% additional payment from employers[14] to fund various welfare programs. These include seven paid holidays per year, medical and accident insurance, education and marriage loan funds, death benefit, and pension schemes.[15] Despite its many benefits to workers and the stability and absence of violence valued by employers, the program by 1992 extended only to 6,300 headload workers[16], about 4% of the estimated headload worker population.[17]

Kerala is not the only state experimenting with welfare boards. The neighboring state of Tamil Nadu is said by some to have a more advanced program benefiting all poor families.[18] Organizing benefits around employment makes the schemes self-financing.

Kerala's headload committees do not require any funding from the state government.[39]

Female Infanticide, Son Preference, and Violence

We note in this book that women have benefited from Kerala's reforms as part of the overall pattern of improvement. This process continues in Kerala. The 1991 Indian census showed that the sex ratio for the country as a whole declined from 934 females per 1,000 males in 1981 to 929 in 1991. Yet in Kerala the ratio went up from 1,032 to 1,040.[40] Recent research seems to confirm the summary we present on pages 87-88 concerning the likely reasons for Kerala's different profile. Selective female infanticide by neglect is the main reason for the excess of males over females in north India. This is dramatically verified by age-based ratios that show more male deaths than female deaths only in the first year of life, followed by a consistent pattern of excess female deaths in all age groups up to age 50. Kerala does not fit this pattern: female children have the same life chances as their male counterparts.[41]

One researcher (Oldenburg 1992) has offered a chilling hypothesis linking son preference to the level of general social violence. According to this hypothesis, parents in north India need sons to protect the family in an environment of frequent violent conflicts over land and other issues. As an indicator of the level of violence, the researcher chose the murder rate. Kerala fits into this pattern because it has one of the lowest murder rates in India as well as the highest ratio of females to males. By contrast, the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh has the lowest major state ratio with only 882 females per 1,000 males and one of the highest murder rates in the country.[42] The connection between son preference and family protection in a violent environment parallels that implied in anthropologist Jagna Sharff's study of long-term U.S. welfare women although here the strategy involves having more children rather than selective infanticide.[43]

Son Preference in Kerala

Recent studies suggest that son preference does exist in Kerala as an attitude, but that female children, once born, do not suffer the neglect leading to childhood death that occurs in north India. On a questionnaire survey in three districts of Kerala, 35% of women preferred having a boy, only 15% preferred a girl, and 50% responded that either sex was fine.[44] At the level of behavior, it was found that both male and female parents are far more likely to undergo sterilization after having one or two male children than after one or two female children.[45] But female children are vaccinated in Kerala at the same rate as males.[46]

Dowry and Dowry Deaths

Indian government statistics list 4,785 dowry deaths for 1992.[47] This is more than twice the 1,786 reported in 1987 (page 95). For 1989, the latest year for which we could obtain statistics by state, India had 1,053 dowry murders of which one was reported from Kerala. The northern state of Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 389 reported dowry murders, 4% of all murders reported for that year in Uttar Pradesh.[48]

Despite Kerala's apparent low rate of dowry killings, problems remain. Studies show that the money transferred from bride's parents to husband's family has been increasing rapidly even among persons who object to dowry as a concept. The form of the dowry may also be changing from a "true" dowry which belongs to the wife and can be taken back in case of divorce to what should more properly be called "groom price" in which the payment is for the privilege of marrying a desirable male. Ironically, the high ratio of females to males in Kerala contributes to the rising price of grooms.[49]

One female response to this situation is for more women to choose not to marry at all. Evidence for this may be available in

the 1991 census reports yet to be issued. For now, we can cite the three districts demographic study which found that between 1980 and 1990, women desiring no children rose from 0% to 9%.[50] Kerala's educated female population does have the option to compete in the work force and live with parents in place of burdening the family with a groom price of tens of thousands of rupees.[51]

The Gulf War and the Kerala Remittances Debate

Since the first printing of this book in 1989, India and Kerala have experienced three major events of relevance to the issues we discussed: the Gulf War, the Ayodhya Mosque destruction, and the imposition of World Bank and IMF structural adjustment policies.

Some critics of the first edition of this book have pointed to our limited consideration of the effects of Kerala labor migration.[52] We accept the criticism. On pages 68-69 we note that over 682,000 Keralans were overseas in 1987. Up to 300,000 went to Persian Gulf states, possibly one in every 12 households.[53] Most of the rest of the migrants were in other parts of India with several thousand in Europe and North America.

The inflow of remittances sent by the overseas workers has been credited with saving the Kerala model from collapse and for preventing rising tensions and violence.[54] In addition, overseas work reduces Kerala's high unemployment.

By 1989, remittances were adding an estimated 13% to Kerala's locally generated per capita income.[55] The money coming in was mostly being spent on home construction and consumer items rather than investment in industry. Many experts have decried Keralans' spending preferences. We are not surprised by the use of the money, however. Even though many Kerala overseas workers are educated or skilled, most are from very poor households.

Our Nadur study found that remittances made up 9% of the total village income in 1987.[56] We also found that villagers used bigger incomes from any source—remittances, land reform, higher local wages, and the like—to improve their roofs, latrines, wells, or to purchase furniture or add rooms to their houses.[57] Given the uncomfortable living conditions of most poor villagers, we wonder why anyone would expect them to invest their improved incomes in a business rather than improve their homes.

The migrant labor debate became more urgent after August 1990. The Iraqi invasion caught over 142,000 Indian workers in Kuwait by surprise. Thousands trucked across the desert to Jordan. The Indian government spent $200 million on 419 flights to bring the workers home. About 40% of the returnees were from Kerala.[58] Many returned destitute, especially the several thousand maids, cooks, and other unskilled workers who had invested their households' savings in the gamble on an improved future through migrant work. In the Kerala fashion however, returnees formed associations to press for government assistance.[59]

Following the main fighting in January to March 1991, many workers returned to the Gulf area. Skilled workers went to Saudi Arabia, but the poorest and least skilled of the migrants stayed in India because their travel resources were depleted.

Early reports suggested that the loss of migrant income would have harsh consequences for Kerala's economy, but attempts to measure the losses found a "surprising non-impact of the brief disruption in the remittances that the Gulf crisis caused."[60]

Rather than Kerala, India as a nation was the big loser because of its strong trading ties with Iraq that had to be broken to support the U.N. embargo and the fact that 45% of India's oil came from Iraq.[61]

The substantial losses from the Gulf crisis along with other major economic problems helped foster the climate for the Ayodhya mosque catastrophe that engulfed India in 1992 and 1993.

Ayodhya: Caste and Religious Violence

Kerala's long record of relative caste harmony was severely challenged on December 6, 1992, when right-wing Hindu mobs tore down a mosque at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh State. The mosque destruction set off riots across India in which more than 1,100 people were killed and thousands injured. On January 6, 1993 a second wave of violence ensued in Bombay when armed Hindu groups—with apparent complicity of some police—launched a terror campaign murdering over 600 Muslims and destroying thousands of homes and shops.[62]

In Kerala, 11 people died in the days following Ayodhya. Kerala's death rate was one-third the national average, but was higher than some states, such as the much larger neighboring Tamil Nadu where only three people died. In August of 1992 Kerala had also experienced Muslim-Hindu violence in which six people were murdered by mobs.[63]

Across India people responded to Ayodhya with manifestations of religious tolerance and calls for unity. In West Bengal, a human chain was formed from one end of the state to the other to symbolize harmony and understanding; in many cities across the country mass meetings and marches were called.

In Kerala, too, progressive forces and ordinary people mobilized quickly to regain the upper hand against what were seen as dangerous, fascist elements. One of the most creative events in Kerala was the painting of a 110-foot long tolerance mural by 130 artists in one afternoon in the Kerala city of Calicut, in one of the most Muslim areas of the state.[64] Another was the action of local Muslim leaders in Malappuram District to raise 10,000

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rupees to repair a Hindu temple that had been damaged by violent elements that broke off from a Muslim demonstration on the day after Ayodhya. The Muslim leaders also publicly apologized to the Hindu community whose leaders publicly named and thanked many individual Muslim families that had taken in Hindus in nearby villages where they might have been in danger.[65] Kerala's image of caste and religious tolerance was tarnished, but significant actions were underway to regain it.

In September of 1993 Kerala held a by-election for the vacant Ottappalam national parliament seat. The district includes a high proportion of Muslims. The Left Democratic Front candidate won 55% in one of the biggest landslides in Kerala voting history, capturing all sections of the district, including a high Muslim vote from many who had previously supported the conservative alliance led by the Congress Party. The Congress Party took 35% while the BJP—supporters of the Ayodhya take-over—got only 6%. The LDF victory may indicate that in Kerala Muslims now feel safer in coalition with the most reliably secular forces. It also seems to indicate that Hindu religious fanatics still cannot appeal to a significant section of Kerala voters the way they have been able to in northern India.[66]

The New Democratic Initiatives–A New Kerala Model?

We noted in the 1989 printing that Kerala had elected a Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in 1987 that attempted to continue Kerala's redistributive reforms. Although the LDF was narrowly voted out of office in June of 1991, its four year tenure was marked by events that may cause it to be later seen as a turning point similar to that of the 1957 Communist ministry.[67] On assuming office in April 1987 the LDF government set out to implement programs that would involve mass participation and encourage local initiative and self-reliance. They named the programs *The New Democratic Initiatives*. Three of these programs became successful or suggested great future potential:

The Total Literacy Campaign, installation of high-efficiency stoves, and *The People's Resource Mapping Programme*.

The Total Literacy Campaign

In December 1989 the LDF government organized a campaign to establish full literacy throughout Kerala. The campaign was run first as a pilot program in Ernakulam District. The 70,000 member activist voluntary organization, the *Kerala People's Science Movement* (KSSP) was called on to manage the campaign.[68]

The Ernakulam District Total Literacy Programme (EDTLP) was opened with marches, street theater, and festive art performances on 15 December 1988 and kept open 24 hours daily until 4 February 1990 when the district was declared 100% literate. Artist groups traveled throughout the district giving street plays, leading group songs, and encouraging people to come forth and sign up for literacy classes, and 174,000 illiterates were identified.

Organizers hoped to teach illiterates to read in Malayalam at 30 words per minute, to copy a text at seven words per minute, to count and write from one to 100, to add and subtract three digit numbers, and to multiply and divide two digit numbers. They also included in the lessons material on nutrition, health, injection timings for children, how to read a clock, how to approach public officials, equality of the sexes, the need for clean drinking water, as well as many other topics.

In February 1990, the District Collector (the highest officer) of Ernakulam declared the district 100% literate: 135,000 neo-literates had scored over 80% on a test given as part of the program; the other 39,000 had failed the test but gained enough literacy skills to continue learning in follow-up programs.[69] UNESCO awarded KSSP its 1990 literacy award for its achievements in the EDTLP.[70]

In the following 12 months, the EDTLP gave the inspiration to the all-Kerala total literacy which mobilized thousands of high school and college students across the state to go into villages, locate illiterates, set up classes, and teach reading. In April of 1991 Kerala became the first state in India to achieve formal 100% literacy.

The campaign became more than techniques and information, however. One achievement was the pride of accomplishment of the mostly low-caste learners. Many of the older learners had fought in the land reform or other struggles. Learning to read and do arithmetic gave them the confidence to challenge government officials above them. One journalist reported that "collectors in Kerala say neo-literates are writing letters to demand better roads and health facilities."[71]

High-Efficiency Stoves: An Environmental Campaign

The LDF ministry also initiated one of India's most extensive environment projects: a mass campaign to install energy-efficient, low-smoke cooking stoves—*chulahs*—in rural Kerala kitchens. Although high-efficiency stoves have been developed in India since the 1940s, few have been adopted. The People's Science Movement (KSSP) again came forward to organize high-visibility campaigns to gain new users.

India's fuel and environmental crises are intertwined. Wood burning provides about 69% of rural energy.[72] The traditional stove burns at only 8-10% efficiency. It also causes considerable air pollution. One study in Gujarat estimated that cooking for three hours led to inhalation of 20 packs of cigarettes worth of benzoapyrene, a likely carcinogen.[73]

KSSP engineers designed a smokeless stove with 25% burning efficiency and have developed a joint program of scientist-villager interaction to encourage adoption of the stoves.[74]

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By 1992, Kerala had more than 200,000 high-efficiency stoves installed, about 9% of the potential user population. This 9% is higher than the rate for other parts of India.[75]

From Word Literacy to Land Literacy: The People's Resource Mapping Programme

Like Kerala's earlier reforms, The New Democratic Initiatives are mutually reinforcing. The literacy campaign included discussions of the need for high-efficiency stoves. Installing the stoves also led to discussions about Kerala's severe environmental crisis. One approach to the problems has been to mobilize villagers to make maps of their resources. Scientists work with villagers in highly-publicized campaigns to identify land, water, and other resources that could be better utilized and to consider carefully how to make development sustainable in the long run. Like the literacy program before it, the mapping program started first as a pilot project—this time in 25 villages across the state. The conservative coalition governing Kerala since June 1991 has curtailed the program, but local peasant and labor organizations, along with the KSSP, continue to work on a voluntary basis. Seven maps are produced in all. The final map is called the "action plan map." It is used in the village for public debate about which areas should be closed off for environmental protection, which areas could be better utilized, and how people could finance and organize the improvements.[76]

In one village where the program is most advanced, involvement of local people led to the idea of an economic survey to supplement the maps. They discovered they were purchasing large amounts of imported dry season vegetables that could be grown locally. Farmers were persuaded to grant free use of fallow dry season fields to groups of unemployed youth who were organized into small producer cooperatives to work the fields. How did they decide where to plant? The locally-generated resource maps indicated where the soil and water table conditions were best for

the program. In 1993, 2,500 unemployed workers broke even financially on an experimental project working six acres of land. The project will be expanded in 1994 and organizers hope it will make a profit.[77]

While too new to be evaluated properly, the People's Resource Mapping Programme—along with the other New Democratic Initiatives—suggests a new generation of Kerala activism and a new set of lessons that may emerge from Kerala.

The need for local initiative, self-reliance, and empowerment may be as great as the need for redistribution. Kerala's alternative approach to development competes in an increasingly hostile policy environment: the Structural Adjustment world of the World Bank and IMF.

Recession or Restructuring?

In the 1989 edition of this book, we expressed hope that Kerala's reforms would show a way to shield the poor against the effects of the 1980s recessions. We now realize that those recessions were part of a larger process of deterioration for the third world poor. Kerala's approach to development thus takes on even greater significance than we had realized.

On page 103 we noted that underdeveloped countries had sent more than $30 billion in wealth to the wealthy countries. It now appears that between 1984 and 1990, Third World countries transferred $178 billion to rich country commercial banks.[78] This phenomenal taking from the poor to give to the rich was accomplished in large part by Reagan era changes in World Bank and IMF policies that emphasized "structural adjustment" rather than targeting aid to the poor. Structural adjustment is a package of so-called reforms aimed mainly at opening government-run economic sectors to private—usually rich country—investors. Structural adjustment advisors from the World Bank or IMF

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usually demand cuts in government services to control inflation. This leads to a better business climate for outsiders but lower wages and increases in poverty levels for ordinary people. Countries such as Chile, Costa Rica, Ghana, and The Philippines that have been structurally adjusted several times in recent years show rising levels of poverty, increasing environmental damage, and little growth to compensate.[79] Structural adjustment seems to mean turning the recessions of the 1980s into a permanent condition.

The severe "global rollback"[80] of the 1980s has exacerbated longer-term trends increasing inequality as well. Using only country averages, economists estimate that in 1960, the richest 20% of the world's people had 30 times the wealth of the poorest 20%. By 1989 the rich had 59 times what the poor had. When in-country inequality is factored in, the richest 20% may have 150 times the wealth of the poorest 20% of the world's people.[81]

Does international development aid counteract these trends or the harmful consequences of structural adjustment? In 1988, about 41% of bilateral aid from rich countries went to middle and high-income countries. Only about 8% of US aid in 1986 was "development assistance devoted to low-income countries".[82] Israel, with a GNP per capita of $11,950 in 1991, received $354 per capita in aid. India, with a GNP per capita in 1991 of $330 (see table 16), received $3.20 per capita.[83]

And what about foreign investment? Sociologist Dale Wimberley found that the degree of transnational corporate penetration of 60 third world countries "has a substantial detrimental effect on food consumption which grows with the length of the lag between penetration" and the data collection.[84] Wimberley's statistical analysis allowed him to predict a decline of 730 calories and 21 grams of protein between countries with the shortest and longest period of outside corporate penetration.[85] Those 730 calories are one-third of daily food needs.

Anarchy or Sustainable Development?

Whether corporate penetration is the direct cause of these astounding figures or whether they result from the structural adjustment programs that precede such investment may be difficult to determine. What they suggest for the near future is easier to understand—but chilling. As anthropologist June Nash has noted, capitalist business cycles are now compounded by "an environmental crisis caused by intensive agricultural practices and widespread exploitation of forests, fossil fuels, and mineral resources, depleting wild fauna and fish that once fed millions."[56] *Atlantic Monthly* writer Robert D. Kaplan warns readers that many third world nations are about to "break up under the tidal flow of refugees from environmental and social disaster." He further predicts a "wall of disease" between rich and poor countries.[57] French economist Jacques Attali, head of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, sees an equally gloomy future:

> In the coming world order, there will be winners and there will be losers. The losers will outnumber the winners by an unimaginable factor. They will yearn for the chance to live decently and they are likely to be denied that chance.[58]

Attali offers a more specific vision for some regions: Africa will be "entirely excluded from abundance;" Latin America will probably "slide into terminal poverty;" Europe and Japan will try to bring India "into their orbit as a beachhead for multinational companies..."; "inequality will cleave the new world order as surely as the Berlin Wall once divided East from West".[59]

Ironically, the growing inequality data and predictions of even more inequality in the future appear just as some economists are discovering that greater *equality* may be good for development. We noted on page 18 of the 1989 edition the study by Cereseto and Waitzkin that found that redistribution has more positive

effects at lower per capita incomes. More recently, economists Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf found that even among advanced industrial countries both productivity growth and investment performance are strongly and positively correlated with equality.[20] *The New York Times* reported that "many economists...[have] begun to see greater income equality as compatible with faster growth—and perhaps even contributing to it."[21] But the policies fostering greater disparities continue to dominate. The 1993 World Bank spending priorities were: $4 billion for structural adjustment, $2 billion for education and $1.8 billion for population, health, and nutrition combined.[22] In 1990, India received $0.30 per capita in all overseas aid for its health programs.[23]

Against the pessimistic and fatalistic visions of writers like Kaplan and Attali, Kerala offers an alternative: redistribution followed by the New Democratic Initiatives. In place of cuts in services to assuage foreign investors, instead of growing inequality, and the deterioration or collapse of secular government, Kerala's planners and villagers are attempting to create genuine participation, empowerment, equality, reasonable self-reliance, and concern for the environment that could lead to sustainable development. Kerala is not the only place where alternatives to a dismal future are being worked for; but the lessons we can learn from studying Kerala's experience now take on an urgency for all the world's poor and for all of us in the wealthy countries who want to work with them to make their lives—and ours—better.

TWO

THE LAND OF COCONUTS

Kerala is a state in the southwest corner of India. Because its name is so similar to the word *kera*, meaning coconut, many people consider Kerala the "land of coconuts." The name is well chosen.[1] All along its beaches and village roads, on the edges of its rice paddies, in the house compounds of its farmers and workers, and extending into the foothills of its rugged mountains, Kerala is covered with coconut trees. They grow out to the edge of the Arabian Sea, where largely Muslim fishing families eke a poor living from their catch. In central Kerala the coconut palms bend and sag gracefully over the inland back waterways. Small boats carry goods past crowded hamlets, past "retting" piles in the water where, for six to nine months, coconut fibers are rotted off the husk. On the nearby land, women beat and pull apart the rotted husks, spin the fibers into yarn, and weave them into the mats that were once a major export to Europe and the United States. The women in this rural coir (coconut fiber) industry work feverishly but are paid little.

Farther inland, in the north and central midlands, coconut trees seem to stand as sentinels around Kerala's rich rice fields where small landowners and hired agricultural laborers use intensive methods to coax precious calories from their irrigated soils. In the southern midlands, the trees look out on more reddish and drier soils that support mostly cassava instead of the tastier and more favored rice grain. And farthest inland on the steep slopes of the Western Ghat ("step") Mountains, the coconut trees finally give over to teak forest, pepper plants, ginger, and, at the highest altitudes, to tea bushes and coffee trees that once brought fortunes to their British colonial owners.

Coconut trees are not idle bystanders to Kerala's landscape or its hard-working people. Even a few trees on a small farmer's or laborer's house site can yield nutritious coconut meat, a rich

cooking oil, sap to produce the mildly alcoholic and mineral-rich "toddy" to drink or sell, husks for the coir fiber industry, and leaves for roof thatching for the poor. In addition, most of Kerala's Hindu families still burn coconut oil in their *vilaku*, or religious lamps. People of all faiths thrill to stories from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* epics as gaudily clad *Kathakali* dancers twirl and gesture to rhythmic drum beats behind the flickering light of a large coconut oil lamp. When one considers all the benefits of the coconut tree, there is little wonder that Kerala has been called the land of coconuts.

In 1987 coconuts covered 28 percent of Kerala's cultivated area, surpassing even rice, which covered 26 percent.[2] So bountiful are Kerala's coconut trees that three of them can produce enough food and cash products to feed one adult about half of the year. Along with its lush rice fields and coconut groves, Kerala is also a land of spices—cardamom, ginger, tamarind, and pepper, as well as rubber, tea, coffee, teak wood, cashew nuts, and many other garden and forest products.

This small strip of land along India's southwest coast contains 39,000 square kilometers—just 1.2 percent of that nation's area and about the size of Switzerland. The population of 27.2 million, 3.5 percent of the all-India total of 781 million in 1986, is comparable to that of Canada. With 655 persons per square kilometer, Kerala is one of the most densely populated regions in the world.[3]

Nearly all Kerala's people speak Malayalam, a non–Indo-European south Indian Dravidian language with major Sanskrit influences. Kerala's trade with ancient Babylonia may go back to 3000 B.C. By Roman times, the area was well known to international seafarers. Because of the antiquity and influence of Kerala's spice and lumber trade, Malayalam has given other languages such as English our words *teak* and *ginger*.[4] The spice trade brought influences to Kerala also, so that today the traditional Hindus found throughout India live alongside large and ancient Muslim and Christian

populations. Kerala's Christians claim their origins from the Apostle St. Thomas who is said to have come to the area in 52 A.D. where he founded one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Today 60 percent of Kerala's people espouse Hinduism, with 20 percent following the Moslem faith and 20 percent following Christianity. A small Jewish population lives in the port city of Cochin, a remnant of a larger community that once played a role in Kerala's substantial ancient trade in spices and teak wood. In recent years much of this community has emigrated to Israel in search of jobs, but there is no indigenous history of anti-Semitism in Kerala.

An Overview of Kerala's History

The earliest-known inhabitants of Kerala were hunters and farmers whose way of life is partly preserved in today's hill tribes. During the first five centuries after Christ, several kingdoms developed. Called the Sangam Age, this period was similar to that of European feudalism. Monarchs lived in fortified palaces on hilltops and prospered from trade and the exploitation of farmers. Kerala's royal courts followed one or the other of India's famous ancient religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, or Jainism. Court life is described in part by the works of esteemed poets and scholars, but little is known of the lives of the common people.

After the eighth century A.D., Hinduism took hold as the major religion, but Buddhism maintained an important influence, especially in propagating education among the higher castes. The present-day Brahmin elite caste took hold about this time while the first Moslem traders began to appear off the Malabar coast, Kerala's best-known historical region.

For several centuries, Kerala continued to be ruled by monarchs who controlled different areas, conquering and reconquering each others' domains. One of the most famous of these was the Chera

Empire of the ninth and tenth centuries, part of which coincided with the area of modern-day Kerala. It was followed by the twelfth century Venad Empire, which lasted until 1729 A.D.

In May of 1498, the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama arrived in the Kerala trading city of Calicut to usher in the period of European colonial rule. Our word *calico* comes from the name Calicut. In 1604 the Dutch came, followed in 1615 by the British and then French traders. In 1792 the English effectively took power in what is now Kerala.[5]

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British governed Kerala as three separate units. In the south, Travancore was ruled indirectly through its long established monarch. The central region of Cochin was similarly administered. Like some other parts of India, Travancore and Cochin were known as princely states because of the retention of the local rulers who were beholden to the British but had some leeway to make their own policies.

Northern Kerala, or Malabar, came under direct British authority and was governed as a district of the Madras Presidency. British property laws and other features of direct colonialism penetrated to the villages of Malabar, causing more severe disruptions of local customs than in either Travancore or Cochin.

Many of Kerala's people joined in the Indian independence struggle. With Indian independence in 1947, Kerala's three major areas had developed a common linguistic and cultural heritage, and most people supported a movement to unify the area. This led in 1956 to the creation of a Malayalam speaking single state. The regions of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar were joined together along with a small Malayalam-speaking portion of Karnataka State called South Canara.[6] The Kerala of the old Chera Empire boundaries was thus reborn as a modern political unit within the Indian federal system.

Kerala's Radical Politics and Mobilization of Peasants and Workers

As in other parts of India, Kerala in the twentieth century produced significant movements of peasants, workers, and low-caste people who wanted more than formal independence from the British empire. They saw in the independence struggle the promise of better incomes and expanded democratic rights. For reasons that we identify in chapter four, movements of the poor and oppressed were far more advanced in Kerala than in the rest of the country.

Kerala has had a complicated political history. In 1957 voters of the newly formed state of Kerala elected a Communist majority to the state Legislative Assembly. This Communist government immediately set out to enact a substantial land reform and to carry out other radical reforms. Following months of right-wing agitation, India's central government dismissed the Communist government in 1959, and Kerala was ruled first by presidential decree from New Delhi and then by a series of conservative coalitions until 1967, when a Communist-led coalition was voted into power.

In 1964 the Communist party of India had split into two major factions, and the Kerala branch followed suit. The United Left Front coalition elected in 1967 included both Communist parties and held office until 1969 when it again fell to internal and external pressures. During the 1970s, Kerala was governed by an unusual coalition made up of the smaller pro-Moscow Communist party of India (CPI) and several conservative parties including the Kerala branch of the Indian National Congress (Congress party) that held power nationally for most of the period. In 1980 another leftist coalition called the Left Democratic Front won control of the Legislative Assembly. It included both the CPI and the far larger Communist party–Marxist (CPM) that has taken an inde-

pendent international approach along with several small parties. This coalition ruled until 1982 when it was replaced again by a conservative coalition led by the Congress party. In 1987 Kerala voters once again returned the Left Democratic Front to power, a position it continues to hold at the writing of this report.[7]

The shifting sands of Kerala's electoral politics are one aspect of the state's radical political history. With left governments in power, major laws have been passed to redistribute income and income-producing assets, such as land, to the dispossessed. But even when conservative governments have held control of the state assembly, Kerala's workers and peasants have won some reforms. This has come about because the left parties, unlike the electoral parties familiar to people in the United States, are made up of highly organized, militant peasant associations and labor unions. These groups continue to agitate for change no matter who is holding formal power in the state.

Although other parts of India, such as the states of West Bengal and Tripura, have also elected Communist governments in recent years,[8] Kerala's left-wing political traditions go back almost eighty years and are firmly entrenched in the state. In the past thirty years Kerala's voters have returned three solidly leftist governments that have held power for eight years. In addition, the left-right coalition that ruled for ten years in the 1970s was pressured to carry out many of the policies of its two leftist predecessor governments (those of 1957 to 1959 and 1967 to 1969). As we shall show, the strength of the left in Kerala is the combined strength of electoral victories and people's movements that have produced Kerala's remarkable reform strategy for development. Despite the many twists and turns of party coalitions and governments, these movements and organizations provide the constant element in Kerala's radical political culture. It is these movements, the organized strength of the poor, that we emphasize in this report.

We shall detail more of Kerala's fascinating history in later sections of this report as we describe the various popular movements that took hold and the reforms they brought about.

KERALA'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Kerala is more than a tiny exotic subtropical segment of the world's second-most-populous country. It is a region in which radical reforms over the past several decades have brought about some of the world's highest levels of health, education, and social justice. Kerala is *an experiment in radical reform as a modern development strategy*.

Kerala is overwhelmingly poor. If it were a separate country, it would be the ninth poorest in the world, with a per capita income of only $182 in 1986. Despite its poverty, Kerala displays a set of unusually high development indicators, as shown in table 1, and stands out among low-income countries and in comparison with the rest of India. These particular indicators are so important because—except for GNP—they all measure things that must be available to wide sections of the population to show up statistically. The GNP per capita is an average of *all* income divided by the number of persons. If wealth is highly concentrated in the hands of a few, the average could be high while most people have little. But the literacy rate can only improve as more and more people learn to read and write. Average life expectancy will also not go up much if only the elite live longer, because even *they* can only live about 75 to 80 years no matter how rich they may be. Similarly, infant mortality and birth rates change little unless large numbers have received the benefits of modern medicine. Thus, these four indicators reliably measure the impact of social and economic development as it spreads to large sections of the population.

Kerala's achievements are not limited only to a *general* expansion of education and health care. One of the striking features of the state is that quality of life benefits are fairly equally distributed among men and women, urban and rural areas, and low and high castes, as can be seen in table 2.

TABLE 1: Comparison of Quality of Life Indicators, 1986

Indicator	Kerala	India	Low-Income Countries[a]	United States
Per capita GNP (in $)	182[b]	290	200	17,480
Adult literacy rate (%)	78	43	na	96[c]
Life expectancy (in years)	68	57	52	75
Infant mortality (per 1,000)	27	86	106	10[d]
Birth rate (per 1,000)	22	32	43	16

SOURCES: Kerala adult literacy rate, 1981 data from Government of Kerala (GOK) 1985; and GOK 1984:28. India and United States adult literacy rate, 1985 data from Grant 1988:64 and 71. All other data from World Bank 1988:222–223, 276–277, 286–287; GOK 1988; GOK 1989:82; and Nag 1989:417.

[a] Low-income countries refers to the average of 37 countries so designated by the World Bank and excluding China and India.
[b] Kerala's per capita GNP was calculated at the rate of 13 rupees per US dollar, the approximate rate of exchange in 1986–1987.
[c] Effective literacy in the United States may be far below the official figure. Education critic Jonathan Kozol cites an illiteracy rate of 33 percent, making the US 49th of 158 UN member nations (Kozol 1985:5; see also *New York Times*, 7 September 1988).
[d] Within the United States there are major discrepancies among various populations. Infant mortality for whites in 1985 was 9.3, while for blacks it was 15.8 (Boone 1989:47).
na Not available

Literacy, for example, exhibits a 9 point spread between males and females in Kerala, while for India as a whole the difference is 22 points in favor of males. Urban India is nearly twice as literate as the rural areas, while in Kerala the disparity is only 76 percent vs. 69 percent. Kerala's low caste population is now as literate as India's urban people, while low castes in the nation as a whole are still nearly 80 percent illiterate. Even for tribal groups living mostly in the mountains, literacy is nearly twice the all-India average, although it remains far below the level of Kerala's other

TABLE 2: Quality of Life Indicators, Distribution across Various Social Groups, 1981–1982

Indicator	Kerala	India
Literacy all ages		
Males	75	47
Females	66	25
Urban	76	57
Rural	69	30
Low caste	56	21
Tribal groups	32	16
Life expectancy (in years)		
Males	64	57
Females	68	56
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000)		
Urban	34	65
Rural	41	124
Birth rate (per 1,000)		
Urban	23	27
Rural	26	36

SOURCES: Government of India, *Census of India 1981, Primary Census Abstract, General Population*, series-1, part II B [i] xxv; Government of Kerala 1984, *Women in Kerala* (Trivandrum: Department of Economics and Statistics), tables 1.12,1.13,2.1.2,2.1.4; World Bank 1988: table 33; GOK 1985:1–2. Average figures in this table will not coincide precisely with those from table 1 because of variation in years for which different kinds of data are available.

groups. In Kerala tribal groups account for 1 percent of the state's population, while for India as a whole they make up nearly 8 percent.[9] Thus, Kerala's shortcoming in this category has less absolute impact than in the country as a whole.

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TABLE 3: Provision of Basic Services, Late 1970s[a]

Feature	Rank of Kerala among All Indian States	% of Villages with Service in Kerala	% of Villages with Service in All-India
Within 2 kilometers			
All-weather roads	1	98	46
Bus stops	1	98	40
Post offices	1	100	53
Primary schools	1	100	90
Secondary schools	1	99	44
Fair price (ration) shops	1	99	35
Health dispensaries	1	91	25
Health centers	1	47	12
Within 5 kilometers			
Higher education facilities	1	97	21
Hospitals	1	78	35
Fertilizer depots	1	93	44
Agricultural pump repair shops	1	65	19
Veterinary dispensaries	1	82	45
Credit cooperative banks	1	96	61
Other banks	1	96	40
Seed stores	2	63	40
Storage and warehouses	4	34	21
Railway stations	8	23	18
In the village			
Drinking water	5	96	93
Electricity	3	97	33

SOURCES: For per capita income, GOK 1985c:24; for other data, Kannan 1988:18–21, based on surveys of the Government of India Central Statistical Organization.

[a] At the 1981 census, India had 22 states, 9 Union Territories including the capital city, New Delhi, some island groups, and other small units. Villages surveyed: 558,519 of which 974 were in Kerala. Number of states compared 22.

Looking at infant mortality and birth rates, we see that rural areas in Kerala are only slightly behind the urban centers, where medical care is easier to provide. For India as a whole, urban-rural differences are especially severe in mortality, with the incredibly high figure of 124 (more than one in ten) infants dying before they reach the age of one year. In fact, Kerala's *rural* infant mortality rate is about one third less than India's overall *urban* rate, a remarkable achievement.

A different way of looking at Kerala's development achievements, comes from a series of studies done by various Indian agencies on productivity and basic services. In agriculture, Kerala ranks first among all Indian states in the rupees value of output per unit of land area. In addition, the state is first in India on fifteen of twenty measures of basic services within two or five kilometers of villages and very high on five others as shown in table 3. In short, Kerala stands above other Indian states in providing basic services to its people, despite the fact that in 1980–81, it ranked seventh among 22 Indian states with a per capita income of 1,421 rupees versus the all-India average of 1,559 rupees.

Kerala in the Development Debate

Why are all these figures so important? Of course, their foremost meaning is to the people of Kerala, who benefit from them. But the data have implications also at the level of international development studies, where Kerala's achievements assume a great importance. Let us briefly summarize the leading points of view on how third world countries can develop, so that we can look both more closely and more broadly at the complex reality that underlies Kerala's statistical profile.

In the forty-year history of development theory, numerous ideas have been suggested. The various writings seem to boil down to four major approaches: growth and modernization theory, basic

needs theory, appropriate technology theories, and radical and revolutionary theories. Each of these approaches has several variants. We shall therefore summarize only the main features along with the most important subtheories.

Growth and Modernization Theory. The earliest and still most widely accepted theory of development in the United States is based on the success of Western industrial capitalism. If only the poor countries can get their economies to grow and modernize, they will become like us, wealthy and developed. One group of modernizers has looked for cultural or psychological reasons for the continuing poverty in the third world. Are peasants economically irrational? Do non-Western peoples lack the individualistic, achievement orientation that helped produce modern capitalism? Are third world cultures sufficiently rationalist and scientific to create modern economies?[10]

A second and more influential group of modernizers rejects the idea of cultural limitations. According to this subgroup, third world people are as rational and can become as individualistic and achievement oriented as anyone else. What is needed is sufficient capital, infrastructure, and management education to stimulate their economies. Growth and modernization theories have been popular among establishment economists and other social scientists in the United States and Western Europe.[11]

But what about the poor? According to the mainstream of modernization theory, the underdeveloped nations can follow the approximate path of the already wealthy. This means that in the earliest stages of economic growth, inequality and poverty might actually *increase* (as happened in nineteenth-century Europe), but as growth continues, distribution will become more just. This is the subtheory of equitable growth. Advocates of this approach view Taiwan and South Korea as examples of the success of their theories.[12] From Kerala's low per capita GNP figure (see table 1) we can see that it does not conform to any of these approaches.

Basic Needs and Special Targeting. Many experts have demanded a response to the glaring fact that despite a lot of economic growth in the poor countries in the past forty years, enormous segments of their populations have remained in abysmal poverty. Basic needs theory is the response. According to this theory, we need to focus on "first things first"[13] by targeting certain assistance to the very poorest to "relieve as quickly as is possible absolute poverty...[and]...to meet the needs of all in terms...such as food, clothing, shelter and fuel."[14] Basic needs theory has become popular among international lending agencies such as the World Bank and AID, the Agency for International Development, as a supplem but not an alternative, to growth and modernization theory.

A recent further modification of basic needs is the theory of the "ultrapoor." Here it is argued that development is proceeding rather well in the poor countries in general, but certain groups are being bypassed and could be left out entirely. Because of urban bias in development strategies, nearly all of the very poorest are found in the vast rural areas of the third world. They are so poor and so deprived of basic productive assets that special targeting efforts are required to reach them. Thus, normal growth and modernization should continue, but extra programs should be initiated to reach those who are not benefiting from the growth.[15] Basic needs experts see themselves as the agents of the redistribution that growth and modernization theory await in the future.

From table 3, we might conclude that Kerala supports the basic needs theory. However, Kerala's achievements result not primarily from a few enlightened policy makers with humane ideas and a lot of foreign aid. Instead, its achievements have been produced by a redistribution of wealth brought about by the organized strength and militant activity of poor people allied with committed and often self-sacrificing radicals from higher-income groups.

Appropriate Technology. "Small is beautiful" theories focus on the need to give development aid that can be used directly by the people most in need. China's barefoot doctors and inexpensive biogas plants using animal waste to produce methane gas and fertilizer are seen as more effective in the short run *and* more environmentally sound in the long run than high-tech medical centers or huge hydroelectric plants to generate industrial power. Appropriate technology appeals to wealthy country ecology advocates, but many in the poor countries argue that large-scale industrial development is the only real means to the higher standards of living they desire.[16] Although Kerala's reformers are experimenting with some appropriate technologies such as low-cost smokeless ovens to reduce health risks from rural kitchens, the state is not a major center of this development approach.

Radical and Revolutionary Theories. These have developed largely in response to the apparent failures of growth and modernization theory. According to these approaches, capitalism itself, though once a source of development for today's rich countries, now stands in the way of that very development for third world nations. One variation is called dependency theory or world systems theory. Its advocates argue that the heavy dependency of the poor countries on the rich for technology and investment distorts their economies so that they are always kept behind the wealthy. A more directly Marxist version is the theory of imperialism in which it is argued that the wealthy countries actually *extract* income and resources from underdeveloped countries through repatriating profits to the wealthy countries and maintaining repressive military regimes in the poor countries to keep workers and peasants from exercising political power. This relationship is the original cause of rich country wealth built on the exploitation of small farmers and workers in the third world. According to this view, socialist revolution and a fundamental break with the international capitalist world is the main prerequisite to effective development. Such theorists point to nations such as Cuba and China where substantial quality-of-life improve-

ments have taken place without the large-scale growth in per capita GNP advocated by the modernization school. A modified version in the Soviet Union is called noncapitalist development. It emphasizes the need to develop the public sector in the poor countries without necessarily having a socialist revolution. Like the more revolutionary versions, this perspective also supports radical reforms in the distribution of wealth and power where possible.[17] Kerala has not had a socialist revolution, but its large and well-organized peasant and worker movements make it an example of the radical-revolutionary approach.

The Redistribution Debate

Within the broad development debate a single issue has come to dominate most writings: which is more effective, growth or redistribution? Although in a perfect world one might wish to have both, it seems to many that the two goals are usually incompatible. Governments must choose whether to proceed with generating more economic output through stimulating capitalist enterprise or to dampen growth by redistributing wealth and then undertaking some form of government-sponsored investment.

Advocates of both positions can find strong support in the data. Research shows overwhelmingly that higher levels of income generally produce longer life, more education, fewer infant deaths, and the like. This seems to close the debate in favor of growth. But studies also show that for any given level of average per capita income countries choosing redistribution (mostly socialist) provide substantially better education, longer life, lower infant mortality, etc., than do those choosing growth alone. The advantages of redistribution are relatively greater in countries with the lowest per capita incomes.[18]

In the redistribution debate, Kerala's experience takes on special significance. Little growth has occurred and per capita income is

Table 4: Kerala in the Development Debate[a]

Growth of GNP Per Capita	Redistribution: Substantial	Redistribution: Little, None, or Negative
Substantial	1 Taiwan Both Koreas	2 Most of Latin America the Middle East SE Asia the Pacific Islands
Little or None	3 Cuba China Sri Lanka Tanzania Kerala	4 Most of Africa South Asia

SOURCES: For per capita GNP growth, World Bank World Development Reports; for redistribution, our assessments based on data in Lewis *et al* 1983:228 and Ahluwalia 1984. Reference period is 1940 to present.

[a] Excluding: Developed capitalist and socialist nations; and Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Vietnam, and Nicaragua, in which large-scale wars and other dislocations interfere with any assessment at present.

very low. The state has not had a socialist revolution, but Kerala's people have organized and struggled for basic reform policies that resemble many of the socialist countries. Kerala's place in the growth versus redistribution debate is summarized in table 4.

What can we learn from table 4? Only three underdeveloped countries have succeeded in achieving both growth and redistribution (box 1). Many, including the countries of Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, have achieved considerable growth, but have had little or no redistribution (box 2). Several, including some of the world's least developed countries, have failed on both counts (box 4). Of the small number of cases representing substantial redistribution with little growth in per capita GNP (box 3), two—China and Cuba—have experienced large-scale revolutions and require separate consideration. This leaves only Tanzania, Sri Lanka, and Kerala to represent the effects of choosing redistribution as a primary means to development, while remaining broadly within the capitalist world system.

Kerala's Special Political Circumstances

While development theory usually focuses on the nation-state as its unit of analysis, Kerala is one of twenty-two states within the Indian federal system. States in India have substantial administrative powers, but they are ultimately under the control of the powerholders in New Delhi. India has so far not had a Communist or Left Front government and many of Kerala's reforms have been blunted by policies from the center. The most important of these was the 1959 dismissal by the president of India of Kerala's first Communist government, elected in 1957.[19] This delayed and undermined the radical land reform described in chapter 8. On at least three occasions the central government manipulated food supplies to undercut left-wing governments.[20] During Indira Gandhi's "Emergency" of the mid-1970s, hundreds of leftist activists were arrested despite their decades-long commitment to democratic and parliamentary politics.[21]

Most recently, Kerala may have been subjected to manipulations of its finances and development budget by the antileft government of Rajiv Gandhi.[22] Kerala's achievements have thus been accomplished without the state power usually associated with

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revolutionary governments. This makes Kerala especially relevant to local organizers and reformers in third world countries where they cannot hope for an immediate opportunity to hold state power.

What Is Redistribution?

Redistribution can include many types of programs and policies. The most radical and far-reaching involve government seizure of private assets such as land and factories and the redistribution of surplus through wage controls and strict limits on private accumulation of wealth. Less profound reorganization involves massive public health and welfare schemes to benefit the poorest groups. The typical package of redistribution policies includes land reform, price controls on food and other necessities, public housing, free or inexpensive medical care, expanded educational services, and any number of special programs to increase social and economic mobility among the poorest groups. Kerala has undertaken virtually all of these policies as keystones of its approach to development.

How successful has Kerala been? The state's people live longer, are better educated, and have better access to health care than almost any population in boxes 2 and 4, which include the majority of the world's people. How did Kerala achieve its development? Are Kerala's redistribution policies the reason for the successes? What are the limitations of the Kerala approach? These are the subjects of the rest of this report.

FOUR

BEHIND KERALA'S SUCCESS

Despite limitations and failures, Kerala's development experiment has achieved many unusual, nearly unique levels of basic health, education, and social justice in the third world (indicated in tables 1, 2, and 3). How did Kerala's people do it? The explanation is complex and still widely debated by outsiders and within Kerala's own substantial scientific community. We believe the main factors can be identified, however, and put into three groups: ecology, history, and people's movements. All these factors influence each other and cannot easily be separated. We shall examine each of them briefly and try to explain the connections.

Kerala's Special Ecology: Equal Regional Distribution of Resources

Kerala's basic physical and geological characteristics help account in part for the state's unique ability to deliver public services. As stated earlier, this narrow strip of land is bounded on the east by the Western Ghat Mountains. Most of the state receives large amounts of rainfall, so water has not been a major problem.

The combination of a rich and fairly evenly distributed set of resources has partly led to Kerala's settlement pattern (unique for India) of having its people relatively evenly dispersed across the land. Because of this, Kerala does not suffer a very large rural-urban distinction. Cities and towns gradually merge into villages, which are themselves not highly differentiated from each other. As one Kerala economist has put it, "Villages are not clusters of houses but a continuum of houses littered all over the landscape."[23] This even dispersion of people seems almost certainly caused in large

part by the lushness of the country, the availability of garden lands for each house site, and the relative ease of getting water, which is in many other parts of India a serious and difficult problem.[24]

Because of the dense and fairly even population distribution, it is simply easier and more cost-effective to provide health and educational services in Kerala than in other parts of India. This helps to account for the near equality in quality of life indicators between rural and urban Keralites (see table 2). Indeed, it is almost certainly the general case that in densely populated areas—such as cities or the high-concentration wet-rice farming areas found in much of Asia—delivery of modern services is easier. This may help to explain the generally higher level of development in densely populated Asian countries than in, say, most African nations where port or capital cities contrast strikingly with the sparsely populated surrounding countryside requiring large investments to connect villages to regional centers with roads and to provide schools, health centers, and the like. In many African countries as well, large areas are inhabited by nomadic peoples whose itinerant life styles make the delivery of health and education even more difficult and costly.

Kerala thus started its development programs with a built-in ecological advantage.

Kerala's History: Trade and Communication

Kerala has been a major international trading center for hundreds—possibly thousands—of years. The region's cardamom and cinnamon are thought to have been exchanged with ancient Babylonia (Sumer) as early as 3000 B.C. Ancient Egypt and Israel also may have traded with Kerala via the Phoenicians who brought gold, ivory, apes, peacocks, and possibly wood or other materials for the famous temple of King Solomon about 1000 B.C.

During the centuries just before Christ, Roman trade developed in ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, cardamom, and the highly prized pepper. In 45 A.D. a Greek-Egyptian navigator named Hippalus discovered regular monsoon winds across the Indian Ocean. With better knowledge of the wind patterns, mariners were able to intensify their trade, and by the time of the European Middle Ages, Kerala was an important entrepôt connecting Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and China. Chinese trade grew through the fifth to fifteenth centuries. It left its mark on the Kerala city of Cochin, which still uses Chinese style fishing crane and net assemblies in the now bustling harbor.[25]

Why is Kerala's long history of international contact and influence so important? It is probably the basis for the development of a progressive outlook by many of the state's more recent rulers. Kerala has been exposed over and over to fairly favorable contacts from outside. Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, Jews, Christians, and Muslims all came mostly without conquest or bloodshed, and this long history of peaceful and prosperous relations with the outside world may have helped condition Kerala's people to respond easily to outside influences.

The greatest shock to Kerala's traditional society came with British colonialism, which imposed foreign rule and drained the local economy for the profit of British investors. Despite the many negative features of British rule, the long conditioning of Kerala's people to take worthwhile outside ideas did help them benefit in some ways. As we shall show later, several important reforms were instituted in the nineteenth century precisely in those princely states that were only *indirectly* ruled by the British. Early land reforms, educational expansion, and the easing of caste indignities all took place in Travancore (southern Kerala) where British political and economic interests were looked after by a local monarch.

In the late nineteenth century, outside forces began to have their greatest effects on Kerala's people. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 stimulated British investment in India. This was the time of deep penetration of the local Kerala economy by British plantations and rural industrial enterprises. Their activities produced in Kerala an especially large rural proletariat or landless work force that is associated in many other parts of the world with radical and revolutionary movements.[26] The workers' movement in Kerala produced a combination of two important forces that have probably caused much of the state's reform success: large-scale and frequent mass actions and dedicated and self-sacrificing cadres and leaders. These developments have gone further in Kerala than in other parts of India, and, indeed, in most of the third world. This part of Kerala's history deserves more detail.

Colonial Capitalism and Kerala's Unique Working Class

Late-nineteenth-century British investors took their primary interest in Kerala's mountains. Cool, well watered, and close to ocean transport lanes, the Western Ghats were ideal for tea and rubber plantations.[27] These were followed in the early twentieth century by small-scale coir mat-weaving factories in the lowland coastal areas. Then came cashew nut processing, cigarette production, tile factories, and sawmills. And of course, the extensive infrastructure to support these activities included roads, railways, water drainage systems, and ports. Even today Kerala has the most developed permanent road system in India.

As the Indian workers, both male and female, were drawn into the British-owned factories and plantations, their traditional ties to landlords, priests, and high-caste patrons were weakened. They came to see themselves more and more as *workers* rather than primarily as Hindus, Muslims, or members of a particular caste. In loosening traditional loyalties and identities, British plantations

and factories were creating in Kerala a working class conscious of itself as a class with needs and interests opposed to those of the owners. This process of proletarianization came sooner and was far more intense and concentrated in Kerala than in the rest of India.

Even as it was tearing them loose from their old identities and structures, the colonial economy was also *impoverishing* people, creating conditions for rebellion. Only one thing was needed to ignite the tinderbox.

Kerala's Committed Cadres

The final factor in Kerala's choice of radical reform as its primary development strategy was the emergence of a remarkable number of committed and self-sacrificing organizers and leaders. From the labor unions, the caste associations, the peasant organizations, and the independence struggle, Kerala put forth men and women who devoted decades to improving the lives of the poorest farmers and workers.

Why this human factor has developed so strongly in Kerala is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps in part it comes from Kerala's sophisticated and cosmopolitan tradition, being a region historically open to trade and new ideas. Perhaps in part it comes from Kerala's ecology where factory and farm workers live next to each other and share family ties, facilitating the spread of ideology from one group to another more easily than in some third world settings. Perhaps in part it comes from the rapid growth of the rural working class through colonial penetration and the stark contrast between the elaborate and rigid caste system and the concepts of social justice and equality that have swept across the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perhaps the rapid spread of literacy reinforced access to outside and locally developed theories of justice and equality.

Most of Kerala's organizers came eventually to join or support the Communist party of India. Most were in and out of jail much of their lives. Many were killed along with the workers they had led into a strike or demonstration. Some became disillusioned with party politics and dropped out of the struggle. A very few gave up their radical ideas and supported right-wing organizations.[28]

For the most part, however, the workers' and small farmers' movement in Kerala has maintained itself for over eighty years. It has produced and sustained leaders from all the major castes and religions. As recently as 1988, 750,000 people joined in popular actions in Kerala's Communist heartland of Alleppey.[29] Workers and organizers are mostly aligned with one of the two major Communist parties, the Moscow-oriented Communist party of India (CPI) and the more independent Communist party of India–Marxist (CPI-M or CPM). Several smaller left-wing groups are also present. These radical organizations differ on strategies and compete with each other for members and influence but generally agree on the basic need to make the poorer groups the main beneficiaries of Kerala's development. This combination of organization, militant action, and dedicated cadres distinguishes Kerala from most of the rest of India and from much of the rest of third world.

What have Kerala's cadres and movements achieved? We now look in more detail at the accomplishments and limitations of Kerala's path to development.

FOOD FOR ALL

Of all the needs in the poorest countries, food is surely the most basic, a prerequisite to health and long life. To assess Kerala's development approach, we need first consider how well the need for food is being met.

Although Kerala has high food output per unit area of land, much of the best land is used for cash crops. This makes Kerala a food-deficit state overall. Much of the distribution of food takes place via imports from other parts of India. In addition to rice, coconut, and vegetable production, Kerala grows a number of cash crops such as spices, rubber, and tea. These cash crops are sold by private businesses, cooperatives, or government agencies on national and international markets to help pay for the imported food grains. The grains, in turn, are distributed through private markets and a network of government programs including school and nursery lunches, special feeding centers, and ration or "fair price" shops.

School and Nursery Lunches

One way to help the poor get more food is by feeding their children at school. School feeding programs originated in the southern districts of Travancore and Cochin in the 1940s.[30] The expansion of the program to all students was proposed in 1957–1959 during what people in Kerala call the first Communist Ministry. (We shall say more about this elected Communist party government later.) The expansion was realized in 1961 with the assistance of Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE) which provided most of the foodstuffs until just a few years ago. The program is now entirely funded by the state government.[31]

Until June 1987 the program offered all students in standards (grades) one to four a hot lunch each day. Eligibility requirements are not employed. In the early 1970s, about 75 percent of all students aged six to ten were actually being fed (with the assumption being that the remaining 25 percent ate lunch at home). By 1987 over 2 million children were receiving the meals, which were designed to provide about 410 calories and 15 grams of protein. In June of 1987 the newly elected Left Democratic Front government expanded the program to cover grades five to seven, raising the number of beneficiaries statewide to 3 million.[32]

In addition to the school lunch program, many Kerala women and their infants can receive one free meal each day at local village nurseries run by women's associations with government funds. In the early 1970s, more than 150,000 women and infants were being fed in these centers daily. By 1988, 9,227 feeding centers were serving 265,000 women and infants.[33]

The Ration Shops

Public distribution of food via ration shops or fair price shops is Kerala's most extensive mechanism for insuring adequate nutrition to the poor. Ration shops were established in Kerala during the First World War, but came to cover large numbers of people in the state only after 1964, when food shortages throughout India caused the Kerala government to purchase rice and wheat to make sure enough was available. Kerala's 20 year lead in implementing ration shops has been followed only slowly, with four other states (Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka) extending the shops to rural areas by the 1980s. In the remaining 17 Indian states, the shops are generally accessible only to people in urban areas. [34]

Food rationing was not simply the gift of an enlightened administration, however. It was primarily the outcome of decades of struggle by workers and tenant farmers to control the landlords

and other elite forces exploiting them. During the Indian independence movement, for example, at a high point of local struggle in 1946, the Kerala peasants' front in Malabar organized a campaign against food hoarding and black-marketing. The campaign included forcible prevention of the movement of grain from the area so it could be kept in local ration shops. Inspired in part by the famous Telangana uprising in the Andhra Pradesh region of India, in 1948 Malabar peasants forced landlords to sell their surplus grain at a fair price. The intensity of these struggles can be measured by the fact that many activists were killed, including twenty-two in a single slaughter inside a prison in 1950. Although these struggles involved other demands such as land reform, the idea of a nonexploitative price for food became a mass popular demand to which successive Kerala governments have had to respond.[35]

Since the large-scale expansion of the program in 1964, Kerala's fair price shops have generally been considered the most extensive and effective in India. We can see from table 3 that 99 percent of Kerala's villages are served by a shop within two kilometers as compared with only 35 percent of India's villages generally. By the 1970s, Kerala's shops accounted for 15 to 16 percent of total calorie intake and 19 to 20 percent of total protein intake in the state.[36]

As of 1988, 4.8 million household ration cards had been issued for purchasing price-controlled rice, wheat, sugar, palm oil, and kerosene in 12,828 shops. In addition, 171 Maveli stores, named for an ancient king, sell an even broader range of products at controlled prices. Both ration and Maveli shops offer special additional goods during festivals like Onam, the Kerala harvest and New Year celebration.[37] Onam takes place in late August or early September, in the Malayalam month of *Chingam*, following the major monsoon harvest. Maveli's name is another word for *Mahabali*, which means great sacrifice in Malayalam. It comes from a Kerala folk tale about an ancient king who led his people

with great justice and social equality. So happy were they that the Hindu god Vishnu became jealous. He incarnated himself and tricked the good king into being sent to the underworld. But before giving in, Mahabali asked for the right to visit his people once each year. In preparation for the visit, people make floral designs in their house compounds. Parades, boat races, and other sportive events embellish the occasion. The Maveli stores evoke the symbolism of fairness and equality of the Onam tale.[38]

On the average, each ration shop is within two kilometers of the 360 households it serves. Some stores are cooperatives, but most are owned by private businesses that receive a fixed profit on their operations.[39]

In 1961–1962 fair price shops accounted for only 13 percent of the cereals consumed. By 1971–1972 they accounted for 37 percent, with the poorest 30 percent of the population getting two-thirds of its rice and wheat from them.[40] It can thus be seen that the ration shops primarily serve low-income groups. This comes from the structure of the ration system, in which access to the shops is divided according to two basic principles.

First, all households are provided with some palm oil, kerosene, wheat, sugar, and special offers at holidays. Kerosene, however, is limited according to whether the household has an electrical connection. Although all of Kerala's villages have electricity, only a portion of households can afford to make use of electricity.

Second, access to controlled prices for rice depends on the amount of rice land owned. A formula grants the full ration to households with less than one-half acre, a one-third ration to those with between one-half and two acres, and no food ration to those with more than two acres. This policy focuses the ration shop rice subsidy on what are believed to be the poorest households. Since any high-income family is likely to invest part of its wealth in rice

land, the land criterion effectively means a progressive redistribution of the rice subsidy to the poorest households.

How Well Nourished Are Kerala's People?

Have Kerala's extensive and widely praised food distribution programs made any measurable difference in the food intake of ordinary people? Seen in the all-India context, this question is of great importance. India is recognized as having one of the world's greatest hunger problems. In the period 1980–1986, for example, it has been estimated that 33 percent of the nation's children under five years of age suffered mild to moderate malnutrition while 5 percent experienced severe malnutrition.[41]

Are things getting any better? While the country imported more than 5 million tons of cereals in 1974 and received in addition almost 1.6 million tons in food aid, by 1986 no imports were recorded and only 257,000 tons of food aid came in. India thus became officially self-sufficient in basic food production. Despite this significant accomplishment, between 1965 and 1985 the daily calorie supply per capita increased from 2,100 to only 2,126, leaving the population on the average still about 10 to 15 percent below the 2,400 calorie recommended minimum. With high levels of inequality throughout most of India, it is likely that substantial malnutrition continues. According to one recent estimate, 85 percent of all Indian children under five are undernourished.[42]

Suspicions abound among researchers about the reliability of calorie counts. For Kerala, studies before the 1970s seemed to indicate a severe shortfall, with only about 1,600 calories per person per day. Economists at Kerala's Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in Trivandrum were suspicious of this figure. The state's high life expectancy and low infant mortality rates seemed

implausible at such low food levels. Revised research methods indicated that cassava and coconuts—major components of Kerala's food supply—were not being counted in the national food surveys. When these were added, a new figure of over 2,300 calories per person per day was obtained, indicating that Kerala's people *are* receiving approximately minimum calorie requirements.[43]

Although research in the 1970s suggested serious calorie shortages in Kerala,[44] studies in the early 1980s show the state's people receiving 2,203 calories per person per day against an all-India average of 2,243. More detailed analysis indicates only negligible protein deficiency in Kerala as compared to 2 percent to 6.5 percent in the nearby state of Andhra Pradesh and up to 8.6 percent in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Iron deficiency in Kerala ranged from 4.5 percent to 17.3 percent, while in Andhra Pradesh it was from 2.5 to 27.8 percent and from 26 percent to 57 percent in Uttar Pradesh.[45] These data support the view that nutrition in Kerala is equal or superior to that of other parts of India.

One way around the calorie-measurement problem is to examine the effects of nutrition on the size of people. Because young children are generally the group most at risk and because malnutrition shows up most clearly in their growth patterns, studies on height and weight of children in the first five or ten years of life have become a commonly accepted method of indicating people's food consumption. Even here, however, various major methodological debates continue, such as which measurements and which standards should be used to indicate which degrees and kinds of malnutrition.[46]

Without entering into this complicated argument, we can consider the position of children in Kerala as compared to all-India averages (see tables 5 and 6). These comparisons are based on extensive studies done by the Indian Council of Medical Research

TABLE 5: Height and Weight of Boys

Age	Height (cms)[a]			Weight (kgs)[b]		
	VPM Village (1983)	Kerala (1965)	India (1965)	VPM Village (1983)	Kerala (1965)	India (1965)
1	78.9	75.6	73.9	8.9	8.9	8.4
2	85.1	82.9	81.6	10.9	10.5	10.1
3	92.0	89.3	88.8	12.5	12.0	11.8
4	98.2	97.2	96.0	13.9	13.7	13.5
5	104.0	102.1	102.1	14.9	14.7	14.8
6	109.8	106.8	108.5	15.9	15.7	16.3
7	115.7	113.2	113.9	18.0	17.6	18.0
8	119.5	117.1	119.3	20.0	18.9	19.7
9	125.0	119.9	123.7	21.0	19.8	21.5
10	na	125.4	124.4	na	21.7	23.5

SOURCES: ICMR 1972: tables 4,6,29,30; Scott and Mathew 1985:75.
NOTE: Averages can be somewhat misleading. A more appropriate form of presentation would be as standardized (z) scores, but the ICMR data are presented as averages, thus this is the only practical means for making a comparison. Further nutritional and growth data on Kerala appear in Panikar and Soman 1984. For a technical paper on height and weight of Kerala children, see Franke 1988.

[a] cms=Centimeters (1 cm=0.4 inches)
[b] kgs=kilograms (1 kg=2.2 lbs.)
na Not available

(ICMR), in the period 1956–1965 before the ration shops became widespread.

In addition to the Kerala and all-India figures, we also present data from one village in Kerala designated VPM, which was studied in 1983–1984. The numbers of children measured were as large as the entire Kerala sample from the ICMR study, thus they may give an approximate idea of more recent sizes of Kerala children.

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TABLE 6: Height and Weight of Girls

Age	Height (cms)*			Weight (kgs)*		
	VPM Village (1983)	Kerala (1965)	India (1965)	VPM Village (1983)	Kerala (1965)	India (1965)
1	76.8	74.0	72.5	8.5	8.1	7.8
2	83.0	81.5	80.1	10.2	9.8	9.6
3	90.9	86.9	87.2	11.9	11.1	11.2
4	96.8	95.2	94.5	12.9	13.0	12.9
5	102.6	100.0	101.4	14.5	13.9	14.5
6	109.5	106.4	107.4	15.9	15.5	16.0
7	113.3	111.9	112.8	17.5	17.2	17.6
8	118.1	116.7	118.2	18.5	19.1	19.4
9	122.6	119.6	122.9	21.0	19.8	21.3
10	na	125.0	128.4	na	22.0	23.6

SOURCES: See Table 5 for sources and notes.

Although the figures should be taken cautiously, they seem to indicate improvement and may show what the ration shops have achieved.

What can we tell from this mass of statistics? Simply this: Kerala's children do slightly better than their counterparts in the rest of India in the first five years of life, then slip a bit towards age ten. From these data, there do not appear to be important differences in the patterns of girls and boys—at least in terms of Kerala versus the rest of India. It should be kept in mind that all these figures are well below the averages for developed countries. Height and weight data for 1980 collected by the Indian National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau showed that "significant progress in reducing the incidence of severe malnutrition" was made only in two states: Kerala and West Bengal.[47]

What can we conclude from the mixed and somewhat contradictory evidence on nutrition? The ICMR study found that the height and weight of children in India was significantly influenced by income. Therefore, when we consider the fact that incomes in Kerala are below those of most of the country, the most plausible conclusion is that Kerala provides nutrition to its population at least equal to and perhaps slightly better than that of the rest of India, despite Kerala's much lower income per capita. The most likely reason for this is the efficient functioning of school and nursery lunches and the fair price shops. At the same time, we must note that Kerala's children remain far below international standards in height and weight, meaning either that some genetic factor accounts for their small size or that there is still a long way to go in providing truly adequate nutrition.

Additional questions and insights come from a further set of apparently contradictory evidence. Research by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau in the mid-1970s showed that of ten Indian states, Kerala had the lowest average calorie intake and supposedly the highest percentage of households with protein-calorie deficiency. Yet among preschool children, Kerala ranked second best of the ten states in height and weight measurements. Such findings suggest at least two forces at work. First, as we stated above, Kerala's people may be getting significantly more food than the nutrition surveys indicated. Second, Kerala's people may get more benefit from the foods they do eat because of the state's better health conditions and care. People who are sick less often do not have as many bouts of weight loss, and those who do get sick can return to normal food intake more quickly if they get immediate and adequate health care.[48] This point leads us to the topic of health and health care in Kerala.

SIX

HEALTH

Following the provision of food, perhaps nothing is more crucial to human life and welfare than conditions for basic health. These include at least two major components: public health and sanitation programs to prevent illness, and adequate health care when illness occurs. Kerala has made major accomplishments in both of these areas. At the same time, we would emphasize that gains in health are not the product of health programs alone, but result from the combined effects of the various reform programs discussed throughout this report.

Public Health Programs in Kerala

Kerala's public health efforts center on four areas: housing, sanitation, water, and vaccination programs. We shall briefly survey the accomplishments and problems in each area.

Housing

Poor housing can be a major source of disease. Dirt floors and palm roofs attract bacteria and mosquitoes. Overcrowding exacerbates the spread of infections and parasites. The Indian census of 1971 found that 20 to 25 percent of housing in Kerala was "not fit for human habitation."[49]

Improvement in housing has thus been a major need in the state even in recent times. Kerala responded by adopting and expanding a national government program to build housing for landless laborers. The Kerala plan is known as the One *Lakh* Houses Scheme after the Indian word *lakh*, meaning 100,000. In each of Kerala's 960 village units or *panchayats*, 100 such houses were to be built for a total of 96,000 units. Each was to have 250 square feet of floor space, with three rooms, a hard foundation, cement

floor, sun-dried brick walls, and a tile roof on beams taken from hard wood in the state's forests. Although the plan was not fully successful and cost far more than originally envisioned, 57,000 houses had been built by 1978. In addition, several tens of thousands of low-income families had houses built or improved under various supplementary programs undertaken by the state government. In 1971 Kerala had the best rooms-to-people ratio and was seventh out of fifteen Indian states with 46 percent of its housing described as "reasonably good." The all-India average was 38 percent. In 1986–1987 over 8,000 houses were built and another 85,000 plus were renovated.[50] The improvement in housing conditions has thus affected a large portion of Kerala's poorer families in the last fifteen to twenty years. Despite these changes, housing conditions remain critical for Kerala's rural workers and small landowners. The Left Democratic Front government elected in 1987 has proposed rehabilitating 50,000 such houses in 1988–1989, along with a 50 percent increase in expenditures per house over the older plan.[51]

Sanitation

Improving sanitation has been an activity of the government of Travancore (southern Kerala) since the late nineteenth century, when Town Improvement Committees and Rural Conservancy Establishments were set up to disinfect wells and water tanks, remove feces from public roads, gravel the roads, and supervise health conditions at markets and religious festivals. Construction of safe latrines was also set as a goal, but progress has been much slower. Many rural families still use open-air sites for human waste disposal. Current budget allotments for these latrines and for sewage appear insufficient to meet the state's ambitious target of safe waste disposal in 80 to 100 percent of urban areas and 25 percent of rural areas by the end of the 1980s.[52] The dispersed rural settlement pattern in Kerala, however, offers a built-in advantage in sanitation. Since houses in the villages are not crowded

together as in many other parts of India, transmission of infectious diseases may be a less serious problem.

Safe Water

Of all the sanitation measures, provision of safe drinking water is probably the most significant in curbing the spread of parasites and infections. International data indicate that for thirty-three countries with the highest infant mortality rates, only 21 percent of rural people have access to safe drinking water. Another thirty poor countries with slightly better rates have an average of only 33 percent of rural people with access to safe water. India—a member of this second group—claims 47 percent for rural areas, 80 percent for urban areas, and 54 percent overall.

In Kerala in 1980–1981, 29 percent of the rural population and 72 percent of urban dwellers had potable water, but by 1985 the figure for rural people had risen to 41 percent as against the all-India average of 56 percent. By 1988, 82 percent of Kerala's urban population had protected drinking water. Despite the impressive gains, Kerala does not appear to stand out among Indian states in terms of access to safe water, and gastrointestinal infections causing diarrhea remain a problem. At the same time, villages with serious water supply problems are among the lowest in India, at only 1 percent, placing Kerala among the group of eight states with extremely low numbers of problem villages.[53]

Another type of water problem facing Kerala in the 1980s has been the onset of prolonged droughts in a region that once had no shortage of water. Kerala is served by two monsoons: a major one from June to September and a smaller one that comes in October and November. The longest dry spell is from January to the end of May. Average rainfall has declined from the 1960s through the 1980s. Many observers attribute this decline to the severe deforestation of the Western Ghat Mountains. In 1905, 44 percent of Kerala was forested. By 1965 this had dropped to 27 percent, in

1973 to 17 percent, and by 1983 to only 7 to 10 percent. Soil studies seem to confirm severe erosion in the Ghats, and it may be that Kerala's once-abundant water supply is threatened by human destructiveness.[54]

If rainfall is truly declining in the long run, Kerala's rural people could face a major public health crisis. Even now, wells in the upland areas run dry in the late dry season and women can be seen walking several miles per day to fill water containers for use in cooking and washing back home. Government programs to combat this problem include the short-term measure of drilling deep motor-driven wells in affected villages and the longer-term massive reforestation projects that are currently in the planning stage.

Immunization

Preventive immunization and vaccination are Kerala's most impressive public health programs. Smallpox vaccination in Travancore began in 1879. It was first made available to government workers and then to the urban and rural populations in general. By 1935, 59 percent of the people of southern Kerala were protected and by the following year nearly the entire population.[55] Similar programs were undertaken to eradicate cholera and malaria. The latter disease required the cleaning up of mosquito breeding areas—a more difficult task than vaccination.

Sanitation and vaccination programs combined with the widespread access to professional health care in Kerala to produce dramatic reductions in several major diseases associated with underdevelopment. Table 7 gives a picture of the decline for the princely state of Travancore, which became the southern part of Kerala when the state was formed in 1956.

By 1970 smallpox was entirely eradicated, making Kerala the first state in India to achieve that goal. Malaria has also been wiped out and has not reappeared in Kerala as it has in many other parts

TABLE 7: Deaths by Diseases in Travancore, 1900–1940
(per Thousand)

Disease	1900	1920	1930	1940
Cholera	1.18	0.27	0.31	0.12
Smallpox	0.92	0.19	0.05	0.17
Fevers (including malaria)	3.47	4.72	3.08	2.98
Dysentery/diarrhea	1.70	2.38	1.57	1.11

SOURCE: Panikar and Soman 1984:33.

of India. In 1976 Kerala's malaria rate per thousand was zero, compared to the all-India average of eleven, with the high-income state of Haryana having the highest rate at sixty-six.[56]

Of all the age groups in Kerala, children show the most dramatic effects of the health programs. As already discussed, Kerala's infant mortality rate is very low (see tables 1 and 2). In addition, children under five fare much better in general than in the rest of India. In 1968–1970 (the latest period for which we could locate an appropriate comparison), Kerala recorded only twenty-four deaths per thousand children in that age group, far better than any other Indian state and nearly three times below the all-India average of sixty-two. Although the death rate for these children is separate from the infant mortality rate, it is a statistical component of Kerala's higher life expectancy as indicated in tables 1 and 2. UNICEF has recently proposed that the under-five child survival rate be considered the single most informative development indicator.[57]

Health Care

Along with public health measures, Kerala has provided the most extensive set of medical treatment facilities of any Indian state. In 1982 there were nearly four times as many hospitals and nearly

TABLE 8: Comparison of Health Services, 1979–1980[a]

Indicator	Kerala	India
Hospital beds (per 100,000)		
Urban	458	283
Rural	107	12
Average area served per health center (square kms.)		
Primary center	232	563
Health center	79	108
Family welfare	29	149
Persons per		
Doctor	2,385	2,674
Nurse	2,538	4,774
Midwife	3,068	4,947

SOURCE: Zachariah 1983:13.

[a] A detailed map showing the nearly even distribution of health facilities is included in UN 1975. We may note also that in 1983, 24 percent of Kerala's doctors and 98 percent of its nurses were women (GOK 1984:77). We have not located a comparable all-India figure. Additional comparative hospital statistics are given in ICSSR 1983:108.

twice the number of hospital beds per 100,000 people as the all-India average. The ratio of doctors to patients was also 18 percent above the average for the country as a whole. In 1982 Kerala spent 35 percent more per capita on health care than the all-India average.[58] Data in table 8 indicate Kerala's superiority in the delivery of health treatment to its rural population as compared with the rest of India.

From this table we can see the unique features of Kerala's health delivery system. Services are available throughout and across the state to both urban and rural areas. Rural hospital beds are much

closer to prospective patients in Kerala than in the rest of India. This helps explain why since 1965, 80 percent of all patients treated were able to get to hospitals and not just to less well-equipped primary health centers. This was far above even the nearest competitor state of Tamil Nadu, which has a 54 percent hospital treatment rate.[59]

In 1973 Kerala had 90 beds per 100,000 compared to the all-India average of 56. In 1981 Kerala could claim 125 beds compared to the all-India average of 70. In 1988 the number of beds was up to 127. By 1981 Kerala had 46 doctors and 3.5 hospitals per 100,000 persons compared with India's 39 doctors and one hospital for the same number.[60] From table 3 earlier in this report we can see how much more accessible are all levels of health facilities in Kerala compared with other Indian states.

Kerala's Low Birth Rate

One of Kerala's most impressive achievements has been the dramatic decline in birth rates. As can be seen from table 1, the 1986 rate is only twenty-two per thousand women of child-bearing age, about one-third lower than the all-India average. In 1987 the rate declined to twenty-one per thousand.[61] Some observers have linked this low rate to Kerala's general poverty and high unemployment rate or to changing attitudes towards the birth of sons.[62] Various studies show that the state's redistribution of wealth and provision of basic health care are the main explanations, however.

This can be proven in the following way. First, detailed statistical research indicates only a weak connection between income and birth rates both for Indian states and for the various districts of Kerala themselves.[63] Second, Kerala's birth rate decline came first in the districts of Travancore and Cochin, where public health measures and access to health care facilities were also earliest to

develop.[64] A recent comparative study found in one Travancore suburb that 72 percent of all births were attended by medically qualified personnel as compared with only 8.5 percent in a village in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.[65] Third, comparative data for India and Kerala indicate that the most powerful factors correlating statistically with birth rates are the combined set of literacy, infant mortality, and life expectancy.[66] Fourth, higher educational levels increase the relative cost of raising children. This rise in cost, together with the greater expectation of child survival through improved health measures and the expansion of old age security through government pension programs (discussed in chapter 9) has reduced the need and the incentive for poor farmers and farm labor households to have larger numbers of children.[67] As Kerala birth rate expert K. C. Zachariah has put it in summing up the determinants of Kerala's dramatic birth control success: "In Kerala, the determinants came in the right order—a reduction in infant and child mortality, followed by or along with an increase in female education, followed by redistributive policies, and finally the official family-planning programme."[68]

John Ratcliffe has put the issue in broader terms:

> Development [in Kerala] was achieved, purely and simply, through implementing development strategies based on equity considerations. The more just and equitable political economy that has resulted serves sharply to distinguish Kerala from other Indian states. And, *therefore*, so do its demographic characteristics.
>
> The Kerala experience...clearly supports the theoretical perspective that low levels of fertility result from public policies that effectively increase levels of social justice and economic equity throughout society.[69]

Popular Struggles and Health Care

Kerala's health care is a popular demand that the government is compelled to meet. Anthropologist Joan Mencher, who has worked in Kerala and other parts of India for thirty years, sums up the situation as follows:

> In [the nearby Indian state of]Tamil Nadu, more than half the times I visited a primary health centre [PHC] one doctor was on leave, another was attending a conference, or one doctor had just been transferred and another was off on some training programme, or had gone to see his or her sick mother, etc. This was not the case in Kerala. When I visited a primary health centre in Kerala, I normally found the two doctors assigned to the post there hard at work and people waiting in a queue for treatment. If a doctor had to take leave, a substitute was normally provided and the doctor was expected to account for leave time very carefully. Furthermore, Kerala doctors on the whole did not regard working in primary health centres as a dead-end job; rather, it was viewed as preferable to setting up practice on one's own.

Mencher goes on to note that "in Kerala, if a PHC was unmanned for a few days, there would be a massive demonstration at the nearest collectorate [regional government office] led by local leftists, who would demand to be given what they knew they were entitled to."[70]

Anthropologist Kathleen Gough recounts an incident in 1962 when angry neighbors dragged a physician from a cinema and forced him to go to the hospital to deliver the baby of a woman who was in great pain.[71] Another observer notes that Kerala village governments, trade unions, and political parties often submit written demands to higher officials for improved health care facilities. Such demands are widely circulated in the local

press. If they are not met, unions may strike or other public agitations may occur. In some cases, officials have been *gheraoed*, or surrounded by protesters who do not allow them to leave their office until demands have been met.[72]

A study conducted in the early 1980s confirmed the cultural and administrative effects of Kerala's popular health struggles. Among the many positive features of a Travancore primary health center, the researchers found that all the staff were regularly at work as required, that doctors and nurses came mostly from the caste and gender backgrounds of their patients, that the chief physician made daily visits to the appropriate neighborhood substations, and that medicines were not being stolen and were always available to patients. The center had even more women than were required by law, which made family planning efforts easier to administer. Serious illness could be referred to a fully equipped hospital nearby.[73] For people who have not lived in the third world, it may be difficult to appreciate this description. For those who have, it will seem unbelievable. The routine practices at this Kerala health center are something hundreds of millions of people in the underdeveloped nations can at present only dream of.

In Kerala, health care is a right. Ordinary people have struggled for it. They expect it. They demand it. They continue to struggle to maintain, expand, and improve it.

SEVEN

EDUCATION

A major goal of any reform or development program is to increase access to economic and social mobility. Such a goal can be justified both on pragmatic and ethical grounds. Pragmatically, mobility means greater participation in economic activity by all members of society, tapping the talents of those previously excluded by artificial social barriers. Ethically, encouraging equal opportunity means forming a more just society according to widely accepted modern standards. Both aspects have been paramount within the Indian independence movement for decades and in the officially stated policies of state and national governments since independence.

One of the most powerful tools for prying loose the traditional social structure is education, which provides training and skills to persons otherwise held back. In addition, education in a progressive political environment can elevate the self-conceptions of the poorest and most oppressed individuals so that they will participate more fully in the development process.

Kerala stands out among all the states and regions of India for its remarkable achievements in raising the literacy level of its people. An overview of this achievement is provided in table 9. It can be seen that Kerala has been well ahead of the rest of India since at least the beginning of the twentieth century, and that the state has continued to expand educational opportunities at about the same rate as the nation. It can also be seen that Kerala stands far above the country as a whole in providing education across urban-rural, male-female, and high-caste—low-caste barriers. In addition, Kerala has an active adult education program that makes possible substantial growth in literacy even for groups bypassed by earlier educational processes.[74] Kerala's educational achievements are so outstanding that they deserve further explanation.

TABLE 9: Comparison of Literacy Levels[a]

Characteristic	Year	Kerala (%)	All-India (%)
General literacy	1901	11	5
General literacy	1971	60	30
General literacy	1981	70	36
Rural literacy	1981	69	30
Female literacy	1981	66	25
Scheduled Caste literacy	1981	56	21

SOURCES: GOK 1984:28–31, Kannan 1988:26; *Census of India* 1981:xxv.

[a] Rates are for all ages, the figure available for the longest time period. All-India rates include Kerala, but since the state has only about 3.5 percent of the national population, it does not substantially raise the overall numbers. General literacy rates include all age groups and are lower than adult literacy as indicated on tables 1 and 2. The 1901 figure presumably includes areas now comprising Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Education in Kerala: A Historical Overview

Before British colonial annexation of the Malabar coast in 1792, the region that became the state of Kerala in 1956 had a functioning system of traditional village schools. These schools catered only to the upper castes and were focused on Brahmanic scriptures known as *vedas*, which the male priests learned by rote. In addition, Hindu philosophy, logic, mathematics, *ayurvedic* (traditional Hindu) medicine, and architecture were taught to some of the highest-caste Brahmin and privileged (high-caste) Nair males.[75]

The first impact of colonial rule on education came through missionaries, who set upon the princely state of Travancore to convert the entire population to Christianity. Establishing schools in that area, they were especially successful in instructing and converting members of the lowest castes, who had the most to gain

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by breaking free of traditional Hindu caste controls. Today, many of Kerala's Christians—who total 21 percent of the state's population— are descendants of these earlier conversions.

The rulers of Travancore were favorably impressed with mission education, but wanting to prevent it from becoming a threat to established high-caste interests, they began schools of their own. The most famous early proclamation was in 1817, when the princess of Travancore called for state support for education so that "there should be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment in Travancore, that by diffusion of education the people would become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the state might be advanced thereby."[76] For much of the nineteenth century a struggle ensued, with local rulers attempting to spread Malayalam-language government schools against the interests first of the missionaries and then, after the 1830s, of the British colonial government, both of which preferred more elite English-language education. By 1894 there were 255 government schools and 1,388 government-aided private schools, with a total enrollment of 57,314. In the 1860s, attention began to be focused on education for girls, but progress was slow, and by the early twentieth century females and low-caste persons were still largely excluded.[77]

In both Travancore and Cochin the turn of the century was a period of precedent-setting developments. In 1894–1895, Travancore began a small program of grants for low-caste children. In 1902 lower grade education in Malayalam was mandated although practically it could not yet be enforced. In 1911–1912 caste restrictions in government schools were formally abolished. Cochin mandated free education in Malayalam in 1908.[78]

Despite these attempts, education of low caste groups was slow to develop. In 1945 the lowest-caste Pulayas in Cochin had 9.8 percent literacy compared with 0.5 percent in 1911. Local government continued with programs to expand literacy, introducing

Arabic-language classes for Muslims in 1920 and Hindi-language classes in grade nine in 1937. At independence in 1947, plans were laid for an adult literacy campaign in Travancore.[79]

Education and Popular Struggles

Kerala's early educational achievements can be attributed to a series of enlightened traditional rulers spurred on by the threat of a large-scale Christian missionary assault that was unique in India. The more recent educational history, however, is one of people struggling for knowledge, dignity, and better jobs. In chapter 4, we described the historical background of Kerala's militant working class and cosmopolitan culture. Education became one of the first and most sustained demands of the twentieth century.[80]

By the turn of the twentieth century, many groups in Kerala were beginning to seek better lives. Caste improvement associations led the way. An oppressed but somewhat middle-caste group, the Ezhavas, was first to act, with the establishment in 1905 of the Ezhava Social Reform Movement, organized by the famous Kerala reformer Sri Narayana Guru. Just two years later a low-caste Pulaya movement was started by the leader Ayyankali in the southernmost part of Kerala. In 1914 members of the relatively high caste of Nairs organized the Nair Service Society to protect their interests and to oppose the domination of the Brahmin castes. These associations, especially those of the Pulayas and Ezhavas, agitated for abolition of the caste indignities that were especially severe in Kerala. In particular they demanded access to schools and government jobs. They also set up public "interdining" events where high- and low-caste people would eat together, publicly breaking a major taboo. These intercaste eat-ins were designed to break the symbolism of caste purity. Caste reformers also fought for the rights of lower-caste people to dress as they pleased and to walk the roads without harassment by higher-caste persons—two struggles that began early in the nineteenth century—and organized temple entry marches that resulted in 1936

in the Travancore Temple Entry Act, which opened the temples of that area to all castes. Influenced by these movements, some high-caste Brahmins also began challenging caste orthodoxy.[81] We describe these caste movements in more detail in chapter 10.

As these movements grew, outside forces began to act on them. Spurred in part by news of the Russian Revolution, caste improvement leaders began working with trade unions and other organizations of the poor, founding magazines and promoting rationalism and scientific thinking, which they believed were weapons for overthrowing the traditional Hindu caste system with its myriad restrictions and indignities based on mysticism.

As the movement spread, literacy became a major component in the strategy of awakening worker and low-caste consciousness. Reading and writing circles were set up in villages. Prominent authors wrote stories and poems with strong Marxist and proworker themes, and workers themselves were encouraged to write and publish poetry and narratives in union-sponsored publications.[82] Village libraries were established, and literacy became a major demand of the growing radical movement. Existing first within the Indian National Congress, after 1939, the radical movement became centered in the Kerala branch of the Communist party of India that had been formed by a socialist wing of the state branch of the Congress. The right to literacy in Kerala was transformed from a purely government-sponsored policy to a popular mass movement. By the early 1980s, there were 4,977 officially recognized village libraries in Kerala, supported by community contributions and small state government grants, along with hundreds of smaller libraries not officially listed but operating solely on private funds.[83]

As education spread in Kerala, tension developed between the earlier government schools, government-aided private education, and the popular movement. This tension reached its height with the election of the first Communist-led government in 1957. That

government proposed a sweeping reform of the education system that would have brought private schools more closely into line with the government schools. This latter issue had caused conflict for more than a century. The Kerala Education Bill aroused strong opposition from the Catholic church, which felt threatened by the bill's provisions for secularization of education and imposition of government standards in hiring and firing regulations in government-aided private schools. Along with the land reform proposed by the government, the education bill became the focus of right-wing protest that finally resulted in the dismissal of the state government by the central government in 1959.[84]

Today conflict continues between the public and private educational sectors, with the private religious schools claiming government interference in their legitimate operations and the public school supporters arguing that corruption and favoritism are rampant in the private schools.[85]

In addition to the public-private dispute, Kerala's education system is marked by two other features unique in India. First, unlike all other states, Kerala has focused educational expenditures on the lower levels, spreading basic literacy farther but resulting in higher education's being relatively less advanced.[86]

Second, the popular component of education in Kerala has also continued to develop. In 1963 the Kerala Peoples' Science Movement (KSSP) was formed with the aim of "mobilization of the people through science." During the 1970s, the KSSP set up study classes, medical camps, and literacy programs in villages. These were supplemented by *jathas*, or parades, that take science puppet shows, guerrilla theater, and other informal educational experiences into neighborhoods and villages, raising environmental issues and other issues of concern in the state today.[87] The organization publishes a Malayalam-language magazine and has established a wide following in the state.

Available data do not allow a quantitative assessment of the *quality* of education in Kerala, but both left and right observers in Kerala politics frequently decry the inadequacy of the learning available in government schools and the superior experiences given to those who can pay for the mostly private, English-language schools.[88] These observations do not mean that Kerala's indigenous language schools are either worse or better than their counterparts in other Indian states.

Effects of Education in Kerala

Kerala's educational achievements have produced a variety of consequences.First, of course, is the sheer accomplishment itself: high rates of literacy among all groups in the population. Second, Kerala's citizens make great use of their education in a variety of ways. These include widespread reading of newspapers—the highest newspaper consumption in India[89]— which are available even to the poorest groups in the village libraries and in tea shops where many workers eat their morning meal. There is also a substantial Malayalam magazine- and book-publishing industry.

In addition, education has helped alleviate Kerala's severe unemployment, which is by far the highest of any Indian state (see chapter 9). Kerala exports educated employees to Bombay, Delhi, and the Gulf States of the Middle East. Even Europe and the United States are making use of Kerala nurses, for example, in fairly large numbers.[90] Literacy in a progressive and mobilized political environment also enhances political awareness. Poor villagers in Kerala can read about their demands and struggles in Malayalam magazines and newspapers.[91]

EIGHT

LAND REFORM

Most underdeveloped countries are primarily agricultural. The distribution of land ownership is widely regarded as a major factor in the persistent poverty of these countries. Without some kind of land reform, many experts believe little else can change. Indeed, in the last forty years most third world countries have carried out some type of land reform, but it has often aided the rich even more than the poor for whom it was ostensibly intended. This may be the case in much of India as well. By contrast, Kerala's 1969 land reform is considered one of the most radical and most successful in South Asia. It contained four major components: a rice levy on the largest owners, to be collected by the government and redistributed to the poor through the fair price shops; a ceiling on absolute size of land-holdings, with excess land to be redistributed to the landless; the abolition of tenancy, and thus the abolition of rent from the operators to noncultivating landlords; and the abolition of tenancy in house-compound land, and thus the abolition of rents to the landlords who held title to them.[92]

There is widespread agreement among observers that the rice levy and the ceiling on land-holdings have not been effective. The abolition of tenancy, however, has resulted in massive redistribution of land rights, and therefore, of income, since much income in agrarian societies is derived from the land. Evaluation of these provisions has stymied researchers, however, because land surveys at various times have collected widely different types of information.[93] In this report, we focus on the minimum effects of the reform.

Land in Kerala is of two major types: rice or paddy land, and the garden lands around a family's house. Both are important and both were affected by the land reform. We examine agricultural land

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first and follow with a consideration of the nearly equally important house-compound land.

Redistribution of Rice Land

One of the difficulties in assessing the Kerala land reform is the complexity of the system it attempted to abolish. Ignoring for this discussion the differences among the three preindependence political units that became the state of Kerala in 1956, we can summarize the land system as follows.

At the top was a class of landlords (*jenmies*) mostly of the Brahmin (Nambudiri) caste who owned and controlled the land but did not cultivate it. Below them was a class of "superior" tenants (*kanamdar*), who leased land from the jenmies, then subleased part to all of it to yet a third class of "inferior" tenants (*verumpattamdar*) who were the actual cultivators. The cultivators often employed members of the lowest-caste untouchables (Pulayas) who did most of the hard field labor. A great deal of land was also owned by Hindu temples in some villages, but this was rented at a nominal fee to Brahmin landlords, who in effect added it to their already large estates.

Prior to the 1969 abolition of tenancy, the lowest-caste tenants (the *verumpattamdar*) were in the most difficult position. Despite some British and princely-state legislation intended to protect them in Cochin and Malabar, their leases could usually be terminated by the superior tenants or the *jenmies* above them. Because of the insecurity of their tenure, they could be compelled to pay exorbitant rents.

To get an idea of the level of exploitation involved in these complex relationships, we can refer to a study from Cochin in the 1940s, in which it was found that cultivator households were paying at least 50 percent and sometimes even above 75 percent

of the gross returns to the classes above them. The split between the *jenmies* and the *kanamdars* is not reported.[94] Data collected by the Communist-led peasants' association in central Kerala in 1948 showed a sample of twenty-four tenant households paying from 60 percent to 94 percent of their gross harvest to the landlords. All but five of these tenants had substantial debts.[95]

Another way to view the situation is shown in the following statistics gathered just before the 1969 act: 8.1 percent of land-owning households controlled 44.4 percent of all rented land and 61.8 percent of irrigated rental lands. Landholding inequality among farming households in Kerala in 1971—just before the act was fully implemented—was the third most unequal in India.[96]

Focusing on one village, a 1971 survey indicated that Brahmin-caste landlords totaling 7.6 percent of the households controlled 50 percent of agricultural land while the local temple board (controlled traditionally by the same Brahmin households) held title to another 37 percent of the rice fields. Seven percent of the land was owned by Brahmin households outside the village, leaving only 5 percent of the rice land for members of other castes, representing 3 percent of the sample households.[97]

A further example of the concentration of wealth and power is provided by the land records of one family that allowed us access to their rental listings, which had been kept for many decades. Data for 1954 showed the family owning nearly sixty acres of rice land and another twenty-eight acres of house-compound land. In 1966 only 2.5 percent of Kerala households owned more than ten acres of land. Although records for earlier periods are difficult to evaluate precisely because of price differences and so on, this nonfarming landlord near the end of the pre-land reform period took a rent of 33 percent of the gross rice harvest, amounting to about half of what remained after the farmer paid production costs. Such data indicate that the abolition of tenancy must have en-

tailed a major redistribution of income. About 1.5 million families received some land in the Kerala reforms.[98]

Distribution of House-Compound Land

A unique component of Kerala's land reform was the abolition of a second kind of tenancy. In addition to the rice fields, the same Brahmin landlords also owned the garden sites on which tenants and agricultural laborers built their houses. House-compound land in Kerala is often of great economic value. Bananas, coconuts, cashews, areca nut trees, mangoes, cassava, and other crops are grown there. There is apparently little research on the amount of these rents, but the threat of eviction from these lands was a powerful weapon in the hands of landlords in getting exorbitant rents for the paddy fields. House-compound tenancy yielded large amounts of produce. Although it is not possible to assess precisely the percent paid in rent out of the total garden-land produce, interviews about prior practices with former tenants yielded statements like "fifty strings of bananas," "several bunches of vegetables," and so forth. Since the harvest on garden lands was more or less continuous, as opposed to the paddy fields where harvesting would occur over a concentrated period of a few days, the returns from the garden lands were probably more difficult for landlords to supervise and control. Thus the direct wealth transferred from land to tenant in abolishing tenancy on these lands might have been rather small. In any case, the combined political and economic effects were probably great, because the eviction threat was removed and some additional produce was made available to the former tenant. Furthermore, the tenant now had a more direct stake in maintaining and improving the house-garden site and the house itself.

The end of house-land tenancy thus meant a major shift in power towards the poor, along with some improvement in their economic position. The poorest farm workers live on the rockiest and least-productive garden sites, however, so many gained little direct

wealth from this transfer. They lived and continue to live in dark, overcrowded thatch-roof huts with no furniture. They sleep on coconut-fiber mats on dirt floors and still have grossly inadequate toilet facilities. The housing program described in chapter 6 has reached many of these households, but thousands remain in living conditions far below what any basic needs concept would require.

Effects of the Land Reform

Kerala's "land to the tiller" land reform is widely regarded as one of the most thorough and well implemented in South Asia. The abolition of tenancy transformed the parasitic landlord class of mostly high-caste Brahmin temple priests and rent recipients into schoolteachers, government administrators, and medium-sized farmers. Although some have suffered, most appear to have adjusted successfully to the loss of their giant estates and now contribute to the development of Kerala's economy. Kerala's land reform also provided compensation to the landlord class. For rice fields, they received sixteen times the fair rent as determined by a government committee. On house-compound land, compensation was set at 25 percent of the market value with half paid to the former landlord by the government and the other half by the new owner–former tenant, spread over twelve yearly installments. Unpaid installments are debts to the government and cannot become grounds for repossession by the landlord.[99]

At the other end, 1.5 million former tenants became small land owners. Despite gaining the land, they are not uniformly doing well. Many have suffered from the declining price of rice relative to other products. They would like to plant more lucrative crops such as coconuts or rubber. They often do not have the necessary capital to alter their land for this purpose, however, and cannot afford to guess wrong about how long rubber will stay profitable compared to mangoes, or coconuts, or rice. Consequently, the direct economic benefits of the land reform have been more problematic than many would have expected, thus illustrating

some of the difficulties of transforming an agrarian society from a feudal-patronage system—however exploitative and unjust—into small-farmer private production when incomes are not rising and prices for agricultural goods are unpredictable. Furthermore, many of the former tenants, now small farmer-owners, find themselves at odds with their farm workers, who were once their allies in land reform struggles. These former tenants now have economic interests opposed to the workers, whose wage gains are their loss. Some have moved their political support away from the left parties and have come to support more conservative representatives in the Kerala Legislative Assembly elections.[100]

Despite all these dangers and limitations, however, there can be little doubt that land reform has improved the lives of the vast majority of people in Kerala's countryside. For tenants who received rice land, the land is often the source of one-half to all of their basic food needs. Now there is no rent to be paid. Now there is no fear of eviction. For those who received only house-compound land, the threat of *that* eviction is also lifted, and they have planted a few new coconut and other trees on what is now truly and fully their own property. For those who have also benefited from construction of a new home in the government housing scheme, life—while still below any reasonable standard for the modern world—has improved greatly within the period of just one generation.

Popular Struggles for Land Reform

Kerala's land reform law was passed in 1969, implemented over the next few years, and today has been more or less carried out. This dramatic land act, however, did not come about merely through a vote in the Legislative Assembly. Quite the contrary, it was the outcome of decades of organizing, petition signing, marching, meetings, strikes, battles with police and landlord goon squads, election campaigns, and parliamentary debates. Nearly every form

of political activity except armed revolution took place in Kerala's land reform struggles.

In twentieth-century Kerala, no issue drew out the passions of the people as did land and tenancy. The reason is simple: land was the major source of wealth. It was the means by which the rich and powerful maintained their control. It was a resource to which the poor looked eagerly and even desperately as their lives deteriorated often to the point of starvation.

The history of land struggles in Kerala is incredibly complex. We shall therefore note only a few of the highlights to illustrate how long and difficult the struggle was and how much courage and determination it required.

Of the three major regions that made up Kerala State at its formation in 1956—Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar—Malabar had the greatest struggles over land rights. In the nineteenth century, British-imposed legal concepts had caused vast deterioration in traditional tenancy conditions for the poorest groups. Frequent rebellions broke out against this deterioration. From 1836 to 1853, for example, more than twenty uprisings are recorded in Malabar, now northern Kerala, in which mostly Muslim tenants attacked mostly high-caste Hindu landlords. Despite the obvious class elements in these uprisings, many British officials chose to see them only in caste and religious terms.

For the next eighty years until the 1930s, these struggles resulted in government commissions, studies, reports, recommendations, and laws, all of which appear to have strengthened the owners rather than the tenants or workers.[101] In 1921 a major violent outbreak occurred, the *Mapilla*, or Muslim, rebellion in which up to 10,000 people were killed and others imprisoned, but the 1930 law that resulted from this rebellion still achieved nothing for the poorest tenants.[102]

In 1915 militants formed the Malabar Tenancy Association. By 1933 it had been transformed into the Kerala Karshaka Sangham (KKS), or Kerala Farmers' Association, which allied itself with the increasingly radical elements in the Kerala branch of the Indian National Congress, the umbrella nationalist movement that was struggling for independence. By 1940 the KKS had 30,000 members. In 1938, with the Great Depression ravaging already-impoverished living conditions, KKS units launched a massive series of rallies and *jathas*, or processions, all over Malabar. These *jathas* coincided with worker strikes in southern Kerala. Landlords hired thugs and frequently called the police to break up the disturbances, which continued throughout the area into the 1940s. The KKS was banned, but in 1942 militants reorganized it under a new name, the Kerala Kisan Sangham, or Kerala Peasants' Union. Much of the leadership had to operate from underground, and many organizers had by this time joined the newly formed Kerala branch of the Communist party of India (CPI). In 1946 the CPI led an unsuccessful worker uprising just to the south of Malabar in central Kerala. This uprising is known as the Punnapra-Vayalur rebellion, after two villages where it reached its climax.[103] Many workers were killed in police and military attacks on their camps, and the party was outlawed. Despite the repression, organizing and protests continued. Many peasants and organizers were killed in prison.[104]

The turning point came in 1957, when voters of the new state of Kerala elected a Communist party of India (CPI) majority to power in the state Legislative Assembly. By this time, the KKS claimed nearly 190,000 members.

The CPI government included for the first time in Kerala cabinet members who were themselves seasoned militants of the peasant and worker movements. Their electoral charge clearly included the demand for radical land reform, and they set out to meet this charge with a series of four major land reform laws.

Landlords were quick to respond, organizing right-wing demonstrations and appealing to the Indian central government to dismiss the Communist government. They did this despite the fact that Kerala's proposed law was essentially what the Congress party, which governed all of India, had itself *said* was desirable. In 1959 the Communist government passed the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill which provided major economic relief to tenants. Just three weeks later, the state government was indeed dismissed, and Kerala entered a period of political instability with recurrent presidential rule from New Delhi. The Kerala High Court declared the Communist land reform law unconstitutional. In 1964 a Congress party ministry passed a greatly watered-down land reform act which one socialist legislator ridiculed as "the Kerala Landlords' Protection Bill."[105]

Tenants and their allies continued to agitate. In 1967 the United Left Front was voted into power. In 1969 this coalition of Communist and other leftist parties finally enacted the law that has come to be considered Kerala's radical land reform. By this time tenants had become disillusioned with parliamentary processes, and in many areas they took matters into their own hands, planting red flags on their tenancies and claiming the right to farm the land without paying rents to the landlords. Further clashes occurred, but by this point popular pressure had become so great that most political parties supported the land reform. A constitutional device was worked out with the central government in New Delhi allowing the law to circumvent the ever-hostile Kerala courts, which ruled against land reform at every opportunity. Land reform in a compromised form that was less radical than that of 1959 but more radical than that of 1964 finally became law in 1969.[106]

Throughout the long period from the 1940s on, and particularly in the 1960s, many tenants refused to pay rents. Where radical organizations were most powerful, they were often able to prevent eviction despite landlord goon squads and court actions.

What can we learn from this brief overview of Kerala's land reform history? Land reform, it seems, no matter how apparently just, does not come about simply as a result of enlightened government or elections. Powerful, entrenched forces are prepared to obstruct it legally and physically. Only the organized and activist strength of large numbers of people with dedicated leaders and a willingness to struggle can eventually pry open the political process sufficiently to make such changes. The continuing militancy of Kerala's workers and peasants, observed in frequent demonstrations, strikes, and petition drives, is the major lesson that thousands of Kerala's people have apparently drawn from their land reform victory.

NINE

HELPING WORKERS

Among Kerala's most dramatic reforms have been programs to aid agricultural laborers, the poorest and most difficult third world groups to empower. Significantly, perhaps, the strength of Kerala's agricultural workers in winning wage and benefit concessions from landowners and government is the relatively *low* percent of workers in agriculture compared to nonagricultural rural workers. In 1971 Kerala ranked first among all Indian states with 45 percent of its rural work force in nonagricultural production. The state of Assam, the nearest competitor, had only 27 percent. Only 34 percent of Kerala's rural laborers are listed as engaged in agricultural labor, ranking the state sixth in that category.[107]

The importance of this data is twofold. First, a high proportion of Kerala's nonagricultural workers have been in strategic sectors such as plantations, toddy tapping (production of a mildly alcoholic coconut drink), coir (coconut fiber) production, and other locations such as tile factories, where conditions favored the building of strong unions. These unions in turn became bases for the extension of radical labor activity into agriculture, which is more difficult to organize because of the dispersed nature of production. Kerala farm laborers have had organizational and political support from powerful and strategic unions in other sectors. A second factor has been the building of a strong Communist party organization in large part through the nonagricultural unions and the tenants who were struggling for the land reform described earlier. The several Communist and Left Front governments in Kerala, starting in 1957, have generally been sympathetic to agricultural workers although they took few direct measures to aid them before 1974.

The Kerala Agricultural Workers Act of 1974

The decades of organizing, strikes, support for nonagricultural laborer struggles, Communist party electoral victories, and the successful land reform finally led in 1974 to an attempt by Kerala's government to codify certain rights for agricultural laborers. The Kerala Agricultural Workers Act called for employment security, a provident fund for death payments, fixed working hours, a minimum wage, an arbitration board to settle disputes between workers and employers, and a clause removing interpretation of the act from the jurisdiction of the civil courts, which in the past have been hostile to the rights of tenants and workers.

Despite the high-sounding tone and content of the act, its implementation has met with extreme difficulty. It has come into full force only in areas such as Kuttanad, where agricultural workers' unions are strong enough to carry it out through confrontation with employers.[108]

Although the act may have done less than its most enthusiastic supporters hoped, its implementation is a potential organizing tool for farm labor unions. More immediately, the passage of the act in combination with the long years of agitation by agricultural laborers has led to increases in wages for these workers, who are generally Kerala's poorest. For Kerala as a whole, the first few years after passage of the act appear to have been those with the highest real wage gains for agricultural laborers in the past twenty-five years. Agricultural wages in Kerala now average about 17 percent of output, possibly the highest in India, although absolute wage rates in rupees were lower in 1974 than in Punjab State.[109]

Pensions

Two of Kerala's most remarkable reforms are unemployment insurance, enacted in 1980–1981 and agricultural laborers' pensions,

started in 1982. Both of these programs were severely curtailed when a conservative coalition came to power in 1982, but about 99,000 of the originally planned 240,000 beneficiaries were receiving their pensions of 45 rupees per month in 1982.[110] By 1986, 200,000 of the originally planned 250,000 unemployment payments were being dispersed. In addition, small numbers of rural households receive widows' pensions and pensions for handicapped family members.[111]

The extension of modern welfare programs to rural households in a third world agrarian society means that Kerala's government has the political and economic power to redress some of the most severe hardships for the poorest groups. A pension of 45 rupees per month (about $39 per year) seems a pittance in the developed countries, but it amounted to 27 percent of the official Kerala per capita income in 1986. This means that the state government was paying about one-quarter of the per capita income for 178,000 elderly agricultural laborers who would otherwise have no support except from their essentially impoverished offspring. In 1988 the number of farm labor pensioners rose to nearly 287,000, and the pensions were increased by 33 percent to 60 rupees per month.[112]

At 1986 prices, the pensions would feed one adult for about one-third of the month. For the poorest households such payments constitute an important benefit even though the younger members must still provide two-thirds of the support for their aged relatives.

In addition to pensions and welfare programs, Kerala also provides a subsidy of thirty-five rupees per child per school year to members of designated (Scheduled) former untouchable castes, such as Pulayas, most of whom are agricultural laborers.

TABLE 10: Comparison of Unemployment, 1977–1978

Population	Kerala (%)	India (%)
Rural		
Male	26	8
Female	29	10
Urban		
Male	25	10
Female	27	16

SOURCE: GOK 1984:128

Unemployment: Kerala's Most Visible Failure

In contrast to the impressive programs to benefit workers, Kerala's economy suffers from a serious, and so far intractable, problem of high unemployment. In 1972–1973, Kerala's unemployment rate was 25 percent as compared with the official all-India figure of only 8 percent. Tamil Nadu, the state with the second-highest unemployment, had a rate of 12 percent, only half that of Kerala.[113] By 1978, the latest year for which we have obtained figures, Kerala's unemployment versus the all-India average was as shown in table 10.

Kerala's unemployment is far higher than India's across gender and rural-urban lines. Although one might question the accuracy of the other state and all-India figures (8 percent seems exceptionally low for a low-income country), the data show consistently unique rates for Kerala. Many more of Kerala's youth are in school, but generally at all older age levels unemployment is far more severe in Kerala than elsewhere in India.

Is Kerala's unemployment a consequence of the reforms? Has a welfare mentality developed, in which people do not feel a need

TABLE 11: Comparison of Work Participation, Selected Years

Year	Kerala			India		
	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
1901	57	33	45	na	na	na
1921	51	25	38	na	na	na
1961	47	20	34	na	na	43
1971	45	13	29	53	12	33
1981	41	13	27	52	14	33

SOURCES: UN 1975:75 (years 1901–1961); GOK 1984:1 (years 1971 and 1981); GOK 1985:16 (1981 totals); Rajeev 1983:51 (1961 and 1971 India totals).

to work? One way to answer this question is to see whether Kerala's unemployment is recent. Another way is to see if it is getting worse faster than India's overall. Prior to independence, Indian data on unemployment appear in a different form, called the work participation rate. This statistic is approximately the opposite of unemployment, but cannot be directly translated into unemployment figures. The work participation rate is defined as the percentage of main workers to total population and is thus more influenced by the age structure and other demographic factors than is the more modern unemployment statistic. Nonetheless, if we examine available data, we can see that Kerala's unemployment problem seems to go back at least to the beginning of this century, as shown in table 11.

The work participation trend in Kerala has been gradually and consistently downward over the past eighty years. It is also worth noting that since 1961 Kerala's rate has dropped less rapidly than India's overall, so that Kerala appears to have improved its relative position in recent years. This may be a reflection of the tremendous migration of Kerala workers to the Gulf States of the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In

TABLE 12: Average Number of Working Days per Year for Agricultural Laborers[a]

Year	Males	Females
1964–1965	198	165
1974–1975	169	128
1983–1984	147	115

SOURCE: GOK 1985b:34

[a] This table refers only to households in 336 Kerala villages called "agricultural laborers." Those calling themselves "other rural laborers" did only marginally better.

addition, many have gone to Bombay, New Delhi, and Western countries, including the United States, where their education and training enable them to obtain good jobs. A growing number of foreign nurses in the United States, for example, are from Kerala. By 1987 over 682,000 people from Kerala had gone outside the state looking for work, but the loss of oil revenues is starting to turn this blessing into a curse. Over 86,000 of these workers have now returned to Kerala, mostly from the Gulf States and mostly for reasons of job loss.[114] They may swell the numbers of unemployed even further, creating a major crisis for the state. Whatever the problems, the numbers indicate that Kerala's people actively seek work whenever possible, even at the cost of leaving their homes and families. Further proof of the hard-working nature of Kerala's people can be obtained, through observation, by any casual tourist in the state.

Underemployment in Agriculture

As important as unemployment is the fact that many workers have too few days per year of paid employment. One of the hardest hit groups is agricultural laborers, one of the targets of Kerala's reforms. Recent surveys of 336 villages throughout the state indi-

cate that work days for agricultural laborers have dropped alarmingly, as shown in table 12.

Many people who are working, and thus not listed as unemployed, cannot find nearly the 260 days per year (fifty-two weeks times five days per week) labor they would take. In fact, rural workers would probably work at least six days per week on the average if jobs were available.

Because the figures in table 12 are averages, they hide the worst conditions that may exist. A study by Joan Mencher in 1970–1971 found in two villages in the main rice-producing areas that the average days of work per year were only seventy-one and seventy-three, respectively, for agricultural laborers.[115] Such persons are in effect out of work. But in poor agrarian economies such as Kerala's, the opportunity to gain wages even for one-third of the year is a sought-after privilege.

What are the consequences of such serious unemployment and underemployment for Kerala's workers? First, they are cushioned by the wage gains of the radical unions. Loss of days of employment does not reduce income as much as might otherwise be the case. Although some analysts claim that union-sponsored wage gains are a major cause of Kerala's unemployment, we have seen no conclusive evidence for this. Second, of course, the various welfare programs compensate for some of the lost wages. Third, Kerala's rural workers obtain some income from the house-compound plots they won in the land reform.

Unemployment, however, can never be fully offset by such mechanisms. Lack of work or shortage of working days means lack of economic opportunities as well as lack of both production and productivity in the economy. No matter which development approach one adopts, unemployment is a sign of wasted human resources. It is the greatest challenge faced by Kerala's planners and politicians in both the short run and the long run.

TEN

OVERCOMING CASTE

In 1893 a Kerala man named Ayyankali traveled in a bullock cart along a public road. His simple act constituted a major public protest against a centuries-old system of indignity that required "untouchables" like him to observe numerous restrictions on their movements. He should have walked. He should have called out his presence to any higher caste persons so they could avoid coming into contact with him or even close to him. He should have been prepared to get off the road altogether in the presence of men of certain higher castes, who might otherwise have killed him on the spot.

Ayyankali's lone protest was but one incident in Kerala's long history of caste oppression and the struggle against it. To understand the changes in Kerala, we shall first give a brief description of India's caste system and Kerala's local version of it. Then we shall examine the history of anticaste struggles in Kerala.

India's Caste System

The castes of India constitute a giant classification system in which all people were traditionally placed. Each person is born into the caste of his or her parents. In the past and still to a certain extent, your caste determines whom you can marry, what kind of work you do, which religious rituals you perform, which gods you worship, to which people you owe special duties, how others treat you and think of you, even how your body will be dealt with after death. The caste system permeates all aspects of Indian life.

A major function of the caste system was to sort people into categories of wealth and status in a highly unequal way and then to provide social and religious justification for that inequality. One

TABLE 13: A Brief Guide to Caste

	Caste Categories	Occupation	Kerala Names[a]	% of Kerala Population[b]
Savarna Castes	Brahmins	Priests, Landlords	Nambudiris, Tamil Brahmins	2%
	Kshatriyas	Soldiers, Administrators	Upper Nairs[c]	2%
	Vaisyas	Artisans,	Kammalans	7%
		Traders[c]	Christians	21%
			and Muslims	19%
	Sudras	Cultivators, Servants	Lower Nairs	14%
Avarna Castes		Coconut tree climbers	Ezhavas (Iravas, Tiyyas)	22%
	Untouchables	Farm and menial workers	Pulayas, Cherumas	8%
	Tribal peoples	Farmers, workers		1%

[a] The Kerala name refers here only to large and generally representative groups often mentioned in the literature. Many smaller castes can also be identified.
[b] The percent of population data are for 1968 as estimated in the Kerala government-sponsored Nettoor Commission (Nair 1976:3). The 4 percent not accounted for above are various other castes.
[c] India specialists will note that Nairs are formally thought of as Sudras. The social and economic roles of some Nair subcastes such as the Kiriyatil, however, include those of Kshatriyas in other parts of India. The Upper and Lower Nair percentages are adapted from data in Fuller 1976:37.

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TABLE 14: A Guide to Some Indian Caste Terminology

Caste Concept	Approximate English Meaning
Varna	Literally, "color," referring to the four caste categories: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras as listed in table 13.
Savarna	A member of any one of the four varnas. It is sometimes also translated as "Caste Hindu."
Avarna	Below the Savarnas, the lowest members of the caste hierarchy. It refers to Untouchables and closely related groups such as the Ezhavas and Pulayas shown in table 13.
Jati	Literally "birth," referring to the local caste or subcaste group, the term of most direct meaning to people. Each Varna has thousands of Jatis within it. Those below the four varnas are also members of local jatis.
Harijans[a]	Literally "children of God," the name given by Gandhi to former Untouchables such as the Pulayas in table 13.
Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes	Used for lowest castes including Untouchables to designate their access to special employment and other programs by the Indian government.
Dalit	Literally "oppressed," a term preferred by militant former Untouchables in many parts of India to designate the political and economic nature of their struggle for better living conditions and dignity.

[a] According to the 1981 census, as many as 105 million Indians belong to formerly untouchable or related groups (Joshi 1986 3).

way of doing this was through the concepts of *purity* and *pollution*. The higher castes were richer, more powerful, and *pure*. The lowest castes were impoverished, powerless, and so *polluted* that the higher castes considered them literally untouchable.

A simplified picture of India's caste system is given in table 13. Several major concepts are defined in table 14. The highest caste is that of the Brahmins. They hold the most sacred place in Hindu rituals. In many rural areas the Brahmins also were, and continue to be, the main landowners. They were thus generally the wealthiest and most powerful group, though only a tiny portion of the population.

Below the Brahmins, people were grouped in descending order of Hindu purity—and wealth and status approximately—until the bottom group was reached. These were the untouchables. In addition to the ritual and religious connotations, untouchables were also so named from the dirty and demeaning work they did. This included labor in the muddy fields, handling corpses of animals or humans, washing menstrual garments of high-caste women, and cleaning feces from the latrines of higher-caste households.

Untouchables lived in extreme poverty in outlying colonies. They had no political rights and were considered disgusting and immoral in their behavior by the higher castes. The untouchables, however, did much of traditional India's basic labor and thus produced much of the wealth that others enjoyed. From the privileged Brahmins at the top to the underfed untouchables at the bottom, the caste system enforced and perpetuated rigid control and "stability."

Because the caste system determines a person's worth according to the group into which he or she is born, it bears strong resemblances to racism in the United States. Indeed, numerous Indian writers have made this direct comparison. The structure of caste and the

struggle against it thus have many striking parallels to movements for racial equality in the United States.

Caste in Kerala

Of all the regions of India, Kerala had the most rigid and elaborate caste structure. The nineteenth-century Indian reformer Swami Vivekananda called Kerala "a madhouse of caste." In table 13, we can see the approximate Kerala equivalents for India's general caste groups. But in Kerala, enforcement of caste privileges went further than anywhere else. The requirements of the system to demean and degrade those below you can be seen in the following examples of constraints on the lowest castes:

- They were tied or bonded to particular high-caste households for whom they were always on call as laborers or servants.
- They lived on land owned by the master households and could be evicted at will if they displeased them.
- They were forbidden entry into the main Hindu temples.
- They were not allowed to bathe in the temple ponds.
- They were not allowed in the public markets.
- They were not allowed to put gate houses at the entrance to their garden plots.
- They were not allowed to have tile roofs on their houses.
- Neither men nor women were allowed to wear shirts, blouses, or a covering cloth above the waist.

- They were forbidden to come physically within prescribed distances of higher-caste members and could be punished by death for violating this taboo.

- They had to use extremely self-debasing forms of speech when talking to members of castes above them.

- They could not take water from wells belonging to other castes.[116]

These restrictions constitute severe discrimination against the lowest castes. But, as with racism in the United States, underlying the many forms of personal humiliation is grinding poverty and economic exploitation. A grim account of daily life for Kerala's untouchable farm laborers was recorded by Krishna Iyer in 1909:

> In rural parts, very early in the morning, they may be seen going with a pot or leaf-basket to their masters' houses for the remains of food and instructions for the day's work. They are kept toiling all day manuring, planting, weeding, and transplanting with the sun or rain beating upon their naked heads and often with their feet in the mire or water several feet deep. In the evening after their hard work, when they return to their huts hungry or fatigued, they have to prepare their food which consists of rice with some pepper and salt or perhaps some curry, and before their meal is prepared, it is about ten o'clock or sometimes even later.[117]

It was against conditions such as these that Ayyankali rode his bullock cart in struggle.

Popular Movements against Caste Discrimination

Ayyankali's ride was neither the beginning nor the end of protest against caste discrimination. As early as the 1820s, untouchable

women had agitated for the right to cover their bodies fully. Other sporadic caste protests occurred throughout the nineteenth century. By 1898 Ayyankali was leading a group of untouchables along a public road and into a public market. This act stirred the passions of high-caste Hindus, some of whom attacked the group.

A few years later, Ayyankali helped organize a strike by field laborers and led struggles for untouchable children to be admitted to government schools. The farm workers lost their first strike, and many of the schools were burned down by upper-caste opponents.[118]

By the first two decades of the twentieth century, however, caste traditions were beginning to weaken and the entire structure of indignities and exploitation began to crack. In chapter 7, we described how the caste improvement associations helped forge popular support for expanded education in Kerala. These educational achievements aided Kerala's lowest castes in gaining access to social mobility and a better life.

Stages in the Caste Struggle

We can identify four major stages in the struggle of Kerala's lowest caste people against bias and indignities and for social and economic rights: spontaneous protests, caste improvement associations, the Temple Entry Movement, and alliance with the radical left and the workers' movement.

Spontaneous Protest. These were the main forms of protest in the nineteenth century. They include the clothing agitations and Ayyankali's early struggle for use of the public roads, as already mentioned above.

Caste Improvement Associations. These, too, have been described somewhat in earlier sections of this report. The caste

improvement associations were instrumental in opening some roads and other public places to low-caste people. In particular, the lowest-caste untouchable Pulayas often united with the far more numerous Ezhavas, who were a notch above them on the inequality ladder. The combined strength of the two groups forced the higher castes to grant them a few government jobs and opened access to education in the early years of the twentieth century. But the caste associations by themselves would not have been able to go much further had it not been for two additional developments: the Temple Entry Movement and the alliance with the radical left.

The Temple Entry Movement. Just as the civil rights movement in the United States came to focus on certain of the most visible aspects of segregation, such as public transportation and lunch counters, the movement for caste justice in Kerala focused on a special target: entry into Hindu temples. Perhaps because this very Hinduism denied them their dignity as human beings and because keeping them out of the sacred places of the religion so dramatically symbolized the concept of pollution, forcing entry into the temples became the major cause of the caste movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Among the many temple *satyagrahas*, or truth struggles, as Gandhi had named them, were the Chengannoor struggle of 1917, the Vaikom Temple Entry Satyagraha of 1924, the struggle at Kerala's most famous temple at Guruvayoor in 1932, and the fight for the eventual Travancore Temple Entry Act of 1936.[119]

The most dramatic was the campaign to open the great Siva Temple at Vaikom in north Travancore, launched in 1924. As with other temples, Vaikom's approach roads were closed to low-caste people. It was near the subdistrict of Shertallai, where an incipient leftist movement had begun among coconut fiber workers of the Ezhava caste. Leaders of the movement announced that they would attempt to use the roads approaching the temple. The first act was an attempt to use one of the roads by three leaders, each representing a particular caste. One was a Nair, a member of one

of the highest castes in Kerala. The three nonviolent disobeyers of the law were arrested before thousands of assembled onlookers. Similar arrests occurred again and again for eleven days. Then the government set up barricades before which thousands of people sat, fasted, and sang patriotic songs. Eleven months later the regional legislature failed by a single vote to pass a law opening the roads.

The following year the Indian nationalist leader Gandhi visited the protest, but was able only to negotiate a temporary standoff agreement that left the demonstrators unsatisfied. Finally in November 1925, twenty months after it began, the great Vaikom Temple Entry Satyagraha ended when the government completed a series of alternative roads so that low-caste people could approach the temple, while high-caste people still had a vestige of their old privileges. In 1936 the temple was finally and fully opened to all castes.[120]

Although the Vaikom struggle ended in somewhat of a mixed outcome, it stimulated great excitement and political ferment throughout Kerala. The spectacle of the police barricading the roads to the temple and facing off against crowds in the thousands fostered greater passions and more radical ideas among the lowest-caste people, along with some of their middle- and upper-caste supporters. In particular, the vacillating role of Gandhi himself seems to have aided in the growth of more left-wing, antireligious sentiment among many of the nationalist organizers, who saw the temple movement as a way to unite all the non-Brahmin castes in Kerala against British rule and for a just and egalitarian independent India. The present-day weakness of the Congress party throughout south India may derive from Gandhi's wavering in the political struggles of low caste people.

Alliance with the Radical Left and the Workers' Movement. In the aftermath of the temple entry struggles, untouchables and their other low-caste allies became more and more united with

Kerala's growing trade union and Communist movement. It was then that some of the caste system's ugliest features were frontally attacked.

One feature of this process was the role of high-caste radicals in helping to organize unions among the poorest and lowest caste people. This meant going to their houses, sitting next to them at meetings, and—when police repression struck, as it often did—hiding with them, working at close quarters with them, and breaking the dining segregation that was a major symbol holding the concept of pollution in place.

Anthropologist Kathleen Gough has followed Kerala politics for many years. She notes that although all the major political groups in Kerala officially preach an end to untouchability, "it is the Communists who eat in the homes and tea shops of Harijans [former untouchables], organize drama clubs among them, file suits on their behalf, and agitate for fixed tenures, higher wages, and a share in the land."[121]

Anthropologist Joan Mencher, who has also studied Kerala society for many years, quotes a Harijan villager in 1971 who remembers:

> Twenty years ago, the influence of Communism brought a new shape to the life of my village. Some of the high-caste Nairs became the spokesmen of this new ideology. My father and uncles also joined them. They, the leaders of all castes, conducted meetings in Pulaya houses, slept in Paraya houses, etc. This phenomenon actually swept away the caste feeling in my village, especially untouchability. I have gone to the homes of many high-caste friends, and they come to my house also and accept food. We have many Nair friends who come to my family house, take food and sleep overnight.[122]

Along with the real and important role of union and Communist organizers in helping to win economic benefits such as land reform and higher wages, great importance was attached to simpler acts such as breaking the eating taboos and crossing the thresholds of each others' houses. These acts cemented the anti-discrimination struggle by making its principles real in people's immediate lives.

Jobs and Dignity: The Continuing Struggle

What has the caste reform movement achieved? Besides having high-caste friends and comrades, what have the lower castes gained? Part of the answer has already been given in earlier sections where we saw the achievements of the land reform, higher wages, and welfare programs. But have the lowest castes really gained mobility from all this organizing and struggle?

One area of clear but limited gain has been in education. As discussed earlier, low-caste people in Kerala have much greater literacy than in the rest of India (see table 2). They are also nearer to the higher castes in educational levels than low-caste people in any other state.

The continuing poverty of the former untouchables, however, severely limits their ability to make use of even the vastly expanded educational services in Kerala. Because they are so poor and because most have not been able to break out of jobs as agricultural laborers, low-caste parents must often put their children to work in the fields to earn additional household income. This makes them unable to compete with children of the other castes at exam time. One solution to this problem is the school lunch program, which helps keep low-caste children in attendance. Equally important is the fairly large system of scholarships. By 1988 over 587,000 Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students received some form of scholarship aid. This affected 79 percent of all students in that category. Another 65,000 got

higher-level scholarships, while over 3,400 received dormitory accommodations and clothing allowances to help them stay in school.[123]

Expanding education creates the potential to improve the job mobility of the lower castes. After gaining literacy, many low-caste people have become officers in the farm workers' and other unions, especially in Alleppey and other areas where the union movement has been active for the longest time. In addition, former untouchables have risen in the political parties to positions of power and influence. The elected Communist government of 1957 included four Pulaya cabinet members, as did the elected United Left Front government a decade later.[124] In 1971 for the first time a former untouchable became a district collector in Kerala, one of the highest appointed administrative offices.[125]

At a more general level SC and ST representation in higher (*gazetted*) government jobs—the sector most easily influenced directly by government affirmative action, or reservation, policies— rose from 8.6 percent in 1987 to 10.4 percent in 1988—well below the rates for lower government jobs but almost at parity with their 11 percent proportion of the population.[126] This was largely the result of dramatic increases in the reservations held for SC and ST applicants after the first Communist government in 1957 and under the recently elected Left Democratic Front. In lower level jobs, 11.2 percent were from these disadvantaged groups in 1988.[127]

Despite these impressive gains, SC and ST positions in universities, medical institutions, and scientific centers are said informally to lag far behind. Only a few statistics are available. At the University of Kerala, for example, only 1 percent of the staff are from the lower castes or tribes.[128] Statistics on private sector employment are also not known to us. There are many recent examples of left and other groups organizing *satyagrahas* outside

the offices of large employers to demand increases in job openings for former untouchables.

With all these accomplishments and with a political atmosphere in which their rights are officially recognized and their influence is fairly large, members of the former untouchable groups are still found mostly in the lowest-paid traditional occupations such as farm labor. Their struggle for basic dignity and recognition may be largely won, but the economic system continues to deprive them in many ways of the mobility and income increases for which they have now been fighting for nearly a century.[129]

Even temple entry battles may not be entirely over. Kathleen Gough witnessed as late as 1964 an unsuccessful attempt by low-caste Pulayas to carry out a ritual in a high-caste Nair temple in central Kerala.[130] There may well be temples even today that maintain effective caste exclusion.

Caste Violence: Kerala's Unique Profile

One of the most important aspects of caste in India today is the widespread violence against former untouchables. Across the country, right-wing terrorist groups and landlord hirelings burn the homes of low-caste people and attack and kill them with alarming frequency. These attacks often follow peaceful attempts by low-caste people to improve their lives. In recent years, official accounts record more than 10,000 such cases *annually*. Human rights workers in India estimate the number to be far greater. Police and courts all too often find insufficient evidence to convict the assailants. An example will illustrate: "In one grimly typical case, a state high court recently acquitted all those accused of the mass murder in daylight of fourteen Untouchables in the central Indian village of Kestara in 1982."[131]

A government study in 1979 called the *Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes* found that 53 percent of villages in an all-India sample still bar Harijans from using common village wells, and 71 percent still bar them from the local village Hindu temple.[132] Hundreds of reports in recent years tell of beatings and gang rapes of untouchables who attempt to change their conditions.[133]

Amidst this violence and brutality against low-caste people, Kerala today stands as an island of peace and tranquility. Caste bigotry has certainly not been removed from Kerala's social life, and high-caste groups do organize and agitate against the reservations policy. Informally, high-caste people often complain about the "unfair" advantages of the former untouchables. And even violence is not totally absent. Women's organizations in Kerala assert that it is still possible for high-caste men to rape low-caste women and not be punished. But compared to the rest of India, Kerala seems years ahead in its climate of relatively peaceful change for people at the bottom of the caste system. Organized gang attacks by landlords have been largely made irrelevant by the land reform. The strength of the unions and the militant egalitarian ideology of the leftist parties make it far more difficult, socially and physically, for goon squads to attack low-caste communities. The fairly well established position of former untouchables in government ministries and the local bureaucracies means that such attacks receive greater government response; these ministers and bureaucrats must respond to their constituents, who include many low-caste voters who turn out in elections and for demonstrations.

One example illustrates the general political climate in Kerala regarding this issue. In 1986 it was reported that members of the police gang raped several tribal women in a highland village. The conservative Congress party chief minister—equivalent to a governor in the United States—made demeaning and derogatory remarks about the women, demanding in effect that they come

and prove to him that they had been raped. The controversy surrounding this issue was not completely resolved, but the incident became a major part of the 1987 election campaign in which the Left Democratic Front defeated the chief minister's party. Observers agree that the minister's handling of the event contributed to his party's loss, although he himself retained his seat in the Legislative Assembly.

Kerala in recent years has seen some increase in caste violence of this kind. The emergence of a radical right-wing Hindu religious party in particular threatens some of the gains of the recent past. Its 7 percent of the vote in 1987 is a clear danger sign for the future, as this party is widely believed to represent the basic ideas of the right-wing gangs that have attempted to operate against unions and the Communists.[134] It is nonetheless significant that the Left Democratic Front ran its 1987 election campaign largely on a principled stand against *communalism*, the Indian code word for religious and caste separatism and violence, and attracted in the process an increase in middle-class urban support while more or less maintaining its hold on the poor. Kerala's record is thus endangered, but in contrast to most other parts of India, the most powerful forces in the state at present are aligned against caste violence.

ELEVEN

WOMEN AND THE KERALA REFORMS

Women make up 51 percent of Kerala's population. How have Kerala's reforms affected them? The answer is complex. We shall first outline briefly some major problems women face in development programs generally. Then we shall look at the available evidence from Kerala on women's progress.

Women and Development

The effects of a development strategy on women constitute an important measure of that strategy's achieving its goals of increased well-being for members of the society. An important and until recently neglected area is women's work and women's role in maintaining their households. More than men, women work both outside and within the household to produce wealth. Household work, however, is not paid, and its importance is only now coming to be recognized. Women's wages are more likely to go to the family than are men's, since women have fewer opportunities to spend money in tea shops, gambling, liquor consumption, and the like. Women's unpaid labor in gardening, caring for animals, fetching water and fuel, cooking, cleaning, tending to young children, and making or mending clothing is vital to other family members. Yet women's abilities to perform these crucial activities can be undermined, rather than aided, under certain development policies. What happens to women is affected by their class and caste position as well as their gender. Nonetheless, most third world rural women are very poor, and for this report we think it sufficient to consider them without regard to social class.[135]

How can development programs harm women? In most regions of India, as in many other third world countries, development programs have stressed increasing productivity through modern technology. In agriculture, most programs concentrate on production for cash, which is controlled by men, rather than on the subsistence economy, in which women play a greater role. In such programs new skills are required, but these are taught most often to men. Thus men come to play an even greater economic role in the household, to the detriment of women, who sometimes see even their traditional sources of income undermined. Women often start the development process with worse statistics on infant mortality, life expectancy, literacy, and other measures. If development programs benefit men more than women, the disparities can increase.

Kerala's Achievements for Women

In many ways, Kerala is an exception to the trend just noted. This can be seen in part from the statistics presented in table 15.

We can see that Kerala women are ahead of their all-India counterparts in many areas. They have higher literacy rates and fewer children. They marry later and live longer. Female children survive more than do males, in direct contrast to the all-India situation.

In addition, Kerala is the only Indian state in which there are more females than males. This particular statistic indicates something that is not entirely Kerala-specific, however. Comparative research in India has shown that female babies are especially at risk of being killed or being allowed to die in north India compared to males. This phenomenon is sometimes called excess female mortality (EFM). It appears to be most severe where women's labor contribution to household income is lowest.[136] Where women

TABLE 15: Comparison of Some Indicators of Female Status, 1981

Indicator	Kerala		India	
Females per 1,000 males	1032		934	
Birth rate per 1,000 (1983)	25		34	
Children 0–4 years per 1,000 women ages 15–49 years	409		546	
	Males	**Females**	**Males**	**Females**
Literacy (%)	75	66	47	25
Mean age of marriage	27	21	23	19
Life expectancy (in years)	64	68	57	56
Infant mortality (1971)	61	55	131	137

SOURCES: GOK 1985:1–2. Kerala life expectancies are for 1979–1980. The infant mortality rates come from Morris and McAlpin 1982:66. We have not been able to locate more recent figures by gender. Some of these data also appear in table 2.

make a greater contribution, they get better food and more access to health care.

The ratio of females to males has actually declined in many Indian states since 1921, while in Kerala it has increased. Why should this be so? One researcher has argued that where there are already traditional biases against females, limited expansion of public health could actually cause a worsening of the life chances for females if a family has to choose whether boys or girls will get the relatively expensive care. This appears to be an especially strong tendency in the north Indian state of Punjab, which is often cited as a major development success story because of the high incomes and increases in the general standard of living.[137] This has not happened in Kerala, as the sex ratio figures indicate. Thus while part of the explanation for differences in male and female survival may be related to the different general production systems of

southern versus northern India, there remains something exceptional about Kerala even within this general context.

How can this be explained? Part of the answer lies in information we have already presented. Kerala's extensive nursery and school feeding programs, ration shops, and the generally greater access to health care combine with the overall lower birth rates to make it unnecessary for families to choose life for one child and death for another.

Women in Kerala have also succeeded in ways not indicated in table 15. Slightly over half the students enrolled in colleges in Kerala are women.[138] In the political field, Kerala has stood out in a small way too. It was the first Indian state to have a woman cabinet minister. Kerala's land reform act was drafted by K. R. Gouri, a female lawyer and one of India's most talented legal minds.

In sports, Kerala women stand out among all the Indian states. They have set athletic records at international events.[139] A recent example was the performance of Usha, a Kerala woman runner who excelled at the 1986 Asian Games. In 1986 Ken Bosen, then India's chief athletics coach left his position. In an interview in the English-language Indian newspaper *Indian Express* (30 September 1986), he said that while India potentially has some of the best women athletes in Asia, only Kerala provided the means to adequately support their training and development.

Female Unemployment and Underemployment

Despite their impressive gains, Kerala's women suffer from many of the traditional problems of women in other Indian states and also from problems that may be associated with misdirected development. Probably the most serious is unemployment. Educated women have benefited from the expansion of the social

service sector. They enter jobs such as teaching, nursing, social work, and related fields.[140]

However many of the state's poorest women must still look for income in the critical agricultural labor sector. Agricultural labor accounted for 44 percent of all women's paid labor in Kerala in 1981.[141] The decline in this sector, as described in chapter 9, is thus especially serious for women. The work participation rate shown in table 11 is far lower for women than for men, and the rate for women has also declined faster relative to that of men. From table 12 we can also see that women have fewer average days of employment in agriculture than do men.

Even when women can work, the jobs available to them in irrigated rice farming are usually the lowest paid and have the worst conditions. Women often perform the most unhealthy farm work, stooping and bending in the rice fields, barefoot in water that may contain leeches and other parasites, exposed to the monsoon rains.[142]

Although unemployment for women is a serious and growing problem in agriculture, Kerala is not unique in India with regard to overall employment by gender. All-India figures show that between 1961 and 1971, the proportion of women in the labor force declined while that of men increased. This has been explained as a result of women's being displaced from traditional jobs in all economic sectors.[143]

Women and Property: Kerala's Complex History

The transition from ancient to modern forms of society has many complex and sometimes unexpected consequences. In Kerala the relationship of women to property has been influenced by recent changes. These occurred primarily among three groups in which marriage laws have been drastically altered with important effects

on inheritance and thereby on women's status and position within households. In the case of high-caste Nambudiri Brahmins, the changes have been in the direction of what Western observers would consider liberation. In the case of the far more numerous Nairs, the changes appear to have been negative, although it is not certain they could have been avoided. In the case of the Christian community, the results may have implications for all women in Kerala. We shall briefly examine each case.

Kerala's local Brahmins, the Nambudiris, were a feudal landed aristocracy. They controlled the land and ran the religious ceremonies through their domination of temples and their exclusive knowledge of the *vedas*, among the main sacred texts of Hinduism. The Nambudiris developed a peculiar traditional set of marriage and inheritance practices to preserve their control over the land. Within Nambudiri households, only the eldest son was allowed to marry. This ensured that the land would not be partitioned over time. But it also meant that many Nambudiri women would never marry. There were simply not enough first sons for all the women, and the caste system prevented them from marrying men of other groups. As a result, many Nambudiri women were kept inside the lavish house compounds of these feudal estates, never marrying and never being exposed to the possible company of men outside their families. Because men could have more than one wife, some Nambudiri girls were betrothed to elderly, already-married men. When married to these aged men, however, their lives may not have been very different from those of their unmarried sisters.

The seclusion of these otherwise privileged women meant they could not work in the professions, travel to markets or to schools, or be seen outside their house compounds. How extreme their house-binding was is indicated by their very names, which some Nambudiri women use even today. After their given names, they call themselves *antharjanam*, or inside person, a reference to their being kept inside the large houses all their lives in the past.

For Nambudiri men life was easier. Although the younger brothers could not marry or inherit property, they lived lives of ease and were allowed out of the estates, which their fathers and older brothers controlled. Many Nambudiri men developed sexual liaisons with women of the very high Nair caste and fathered children by them because of the convenient system of Nair inheritance through women called matriliny. This meant that the Nambudiri men might provide some financial support but had no formal obligations to these children, whose family membership was determined only by their mothers' kinship group. Nair men could also visit the Nair women and become temporary husbands, so that it could not always be determined if a child born of a Nair woman was a mixed Nair-Nambudiri or a Nair-Nair. Because the Nair caste held land and family membership through the collective female kinship group, it ultimately did not matter who was the biological father.

This arrangement of caste, land, inheritance, sex, marriage, and gender inequality sustained itself for centuries in Kerala, and it had many other aspects that we cannot attempt to discuss in this report. The important thing to see is that it existed in part on an extreme denial of the simple rights of the vast majority of Nambudiri women to any possibility of sexual or child-bearing fulfillment. And their seclusion within the Nambudiri estates, combined with the rigid caste restrictions on social interaction, meant that they had little contact with anyone outside their own immediate household throughout their lives.

In the Malabar region of northern Kerala, the Nambudiri marriage system was reformed by the 1933 Madras Nambudiri Act. This law allowed partition of the family property and provided for the specific right of junior sons to marry and receive inheritance. Women, as well, were entitled to an equal share in the family property.

This law, although enacted under British colonial rule, was in large part the result of sustained agitation by radical young Nambudiris who objected to the control over women as well as to the dominance of a single male in each generation over all the family property. It was part of the emerging radical movement against the caste system itself, and among the activists in central Kerala where the movement was strongest there were Nambudiris who later became leaders in the Kerala part of the Indian independence movement and the Kerala Communist party.[144]

Among women of the far more numerous Nair caste, however, recent marriage and inheritance reforms have had more mixed effects. While Nambudiris number less than 2 percent of Kerala's population, Nairs make up about 16 percent. Prior to the colonial era, Nairs lived in matrilineal joint households called *taravads*. These *taravads* owned all household property and had their identity through a common female ancestor. Adult males of the Nair caste could marry women within the *taravads*, but did not acquire permanent rights to property or to the women themselves. Thus Nair women were economically dependent not on their husbands but on the joint family unit.[145] In addition, women could have more than one husband. Their freedom in forming sexual relationships with men brought them a certain fame among early travelers and later anthropologists. The British colonial rulers found both the sexual and property aspects of the Nair *taravad* unacceptable.[146]

Why Kerala's Nairs developed their particular system of marriage and inheritance is still debated. One reason may be that many Nair men were warriors and it was more sensible to situate children's rights with the mothers, who were not so likely to be killed or to be off at war for long periods. Another element may be the very Nambudiri system described just above in which the first-son-only marriage rule meant there were always many high-caste men looking for sexual partners. The Nair system might thus be an adaptation to the demands of the highest caste Brahmins.

From the point of view of Indian male social reformers as well as that of the British, the Nair system appeared old-fashioned and "incorrect." Men fathered children for whom they bore no financial responsibility. In fact, this may have been rather unimportant because the *taravad* had resources of its own. But many men joined in the British attack on Nair matrilineal joint households in the belief that husbands and fathers should take responsibility for their children. The relative sexual freedom of Nair women was destroyed in the process.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several Nair marriage and inheritance acts were promulgated. Nair women became more dependent on their husbands, while Nair men acquired the right to leave property to their children.[147] *Taravad* joint property was divided up. Women without husbands became more vulnerable to economic distress.

Kerala's recent land reform has been criticized by some feminist observers for further encouraging the break up of *taravad* property, but it seems this was already far advanced by the 1950s.[148] The full effects of changing marriage and inheritance laws in Kerala deserve detailed study, but it does seem that Nair women lost a great deal of independence compared to men with the breakup of their traditional family system. On the other hand, many very poor Nair women have benefited, alongside their husbands, from the land reform, workers' acts, and so forth.

One other community has had recent struggles over women's rights within the family. In 1986 the Kerala Supreme Court found that women have equal rights with men regarding the inheritance of family property.[149] The case involved a Christian household, and it is not yet certain whether the ruling will be considered valid for other communities as well. In divorce, inheritance, and marriage cases generally, Indian women, including those in Kerala, have found the legal system only sometimes supportive and much agitation continues for more equal laws and enforcement.

Violence against Women: Kerala's Uncertain Record

In many societies women face special forms of violence, and a greater degree of violence, than do men. We have already noted the problem of excess female mortality—allowing female infants to die in north India. Kerala does not suffer from this form of antifemale violence.

Another type of violence is rape. Rape statistics in India are very incomplete, so we cannot offer any comparative data. Members of some Kerala women's organizations, however, informed us that rape does occur and is more of a problem for low-caste women, who are victims of higher-caste men. It is not clear whether Kerala's rape rate is better or worse than that of other parts of India. Wife-beating and murder of an allegedly unfaithful wife are occasionally reported in newspapers, but we are not aware of statistical data on their incidence.

Another form of violence is growing in India today: dowry deaths. Although officially illegal, dowries are demanded by many Indian families from the bride's parents. Land, gold, money, or consumer goods may be asked. If the groom's family is dissatisfied with the dowry, they may cancel the marriage. In more extreme cases, someone arranges an "accident" for the new bride, usually in the kitchen, where it is said she spilled cooking oil on herself and caught on fire. The eyewitnesses to this gruesome event are usually members of the groom's family, and police and the courts have shown themselves reluctant to press the investigation. The groom may go on to marry again and collect another dowry.

Most dowry deaths occur in north India. One feminist activist told us she believes such killings occur as frequently as twice daily in that part of the country. Official statistics indicate 1,786 registered cases in 1987.[150] Kerala has until recently been relatively free of dowry killings, but there is evidence that they are becoming

slightly more common. On November 4, 1988, four Kerala sisters apparently committed suicide by hanging, in a macabre variation of the dowry death phenomenon. Their note read: "Our parents are not yet to pay fully for the dowry of our sister who was married sometime ago. Having sold their gold and land, we are not sure that they will be able to provide anything for our marriages. Hence the decision to end our lives."[151] Kerala's suicide rate appears to be higher than most Indian states, but it has India's second lowest-rate of juvenile delinquency.[152]

The great influx of money from workers in the Gulf States has revived the dowry system. Kerala women's organizations are attempting to fight this development. They have organized street plays in which the dowry system is attacked. They also distribute literature opposing dowries and attempt to force police and courts to conduct proper investigations of suspicious deaths of females. Dowries are deeply rooted in Indian society, however, and they are unlikely to disappear until far-reaching changes occur in marriage practices and in attitudes towards material possessions.[153]

Finally, Kerala women, like their other Indian counterparts, are often subjected to sexual harassment, known as Eve-teasing. Women are not supposed to travel alone. And, much like women in the developed countries they may also suffer on-the-job sexual exploitation by male superiors.[154] In Kerala, even bus seats are segregated sexually, and a woman does not feel free to take a seat next to a man for fear of the impact on her reputation.

Women and Political Power

In Kerala women have not been the major focus of the many popular reform struggles. As half the population, however, they have necessarily been drawn into the movements as workers, as untouchables, or in other ways. In areas where agricultural labor unions have been active for many years and where radical in-

fluence is the strongest, women have achieved greater wage equality with men than in areas where the unions are weaker.[155] Women's organizations in Kerala have far greater male leadership than would be considered acceptable by Western feminists. Men are frequently the main speakers at women's organization events.

Much of Kerala's activity toward women centers on health care. The People's Science Movement, mentioned earlier, has set up health camps for women. In 1986 the All-India Democratic Women's Association, affiliated with the CPM, held its second annual convention in Kerala. Delegates from all over India joined about 35,000 women and girls in a spirited march through the streets of the capital city of Trivandrum. Men did not march, but shouted supportive slogans from the sidelines. Unlike some developed nations' women's events, which draw mostly from the middle class, the Kerala demonstration was filled with working class women and girls and barefooted peasants, members of local groups that are attempting to stop violence and build the movement to improve women's lives. Despite the many difficulties they face, Kerala's women have many structures and organizations in place that offer the potential for overcoming their problems.

TWELVE

LESSONS FROM KERALA

What can we learn from Kerala's development experience so far? As we showed in chapter 4, Kerala has many unique ecological and historical features that do not exist or cannot be repeated in other places. A thorough set of lessons can only be gathered through a careful *comparative* study with special attention to the details and conditions under which each nation or region is attempting to bring the benefits of modern life to all its people. Kerala thus cannot offer a model to be copied. Rather it provides lessons that may be used to evaluate the development efforts of other societies or—for those directly involved in development work either from the developed or from within the developing countries themselves—to suggest strategies for improving their work. In this spirit, we offer the following tentative lessons from the Kerala experience.

1. Radical reforms deliver effective and mutually reinforcing benefits to the poor even when per capita incomes remain low. The information presented in this report demonstrates that Kerala's choice of radical reforms has produced benefits to all the state's people that no other Indian state and few other third world nations have accomplished. Many third world countries with far higher per capita incomes stand way below Kerala in education, life expectancy, infant mortality, and so on.

Kerala's achievements are more than the sum of a list of reforms, however. The reforms are mutually reinforcing and thus produce greater overall effects than might appear from simply adding up the list we made in order to examine each in detail. The popular organizations and structures that have produced the reforms are themselves further strengthened by them. The land reform, for example, removed the threat of eviction of tenants, making possible their greater political participation without fear. Political organization and struggle, redistribution, democracy, participa-

tion, basic services, empowerment of the poor: these are the combined features of Kerala's recent history.

2. Popular movements and militant progressive organizations with dedicated leaders are necessary to initiate and sustain the process of reform. In terms of action, Kerala's most important lesson is that the poor must be organized to ensure that their needs are met. The poor cannot depend on benevolent rulers or outside development agencies. Just as in the developed countries, the poor need the strength of their numbers in organizations that truly represent them in legislative bodies and on the ground to press for their demands. They must be organized to agitate when necessary to protect themselves against the interests of the wealthy, whose power is built right into the daily workings of the social and political structure. The success of popular movements in Kerala has resulted in the following additional lessons, both positive and negative.

3. Despite their beneficial consequences in many areas, radical reforms cannot necessarily create employment or raise general levels of per capita income. Kerala's reforms have not raised agricultural production or alleviated unemployment—both chronic problems in many third world economies. Whether reforms can stimulate production and employment opportunities is hotly debated and must be studied in greater comparative detail. Kerala's experience in this regard, however, is sufficient to indicate that it is not a cheap alternative to the need for income growth and production increases.[156]

4. Local reformers are restricted by national politics. Kerala's reforms have been carried out despite frequent opposition from the more powerful Indian central government. We noted some of the problems in chapter 3. Kerala's minister for finance recently complained that the state is receiving 30 percent less than the all-India average in development funds. He has also charged the central government with freezing state bank funds and providing only

about half the per capita investment in industry deserved by the state.[157] If such allegations are correct, Kerala's left-wing governments face difficult challenges in administering their development approach.

5. Public distribution of food is a rational and highly effective policy choice in very poor agrarian economies. Kerala's school and nursery feeding programs and especially its thorough and full-coverage fair price shops ensure at least a minimum food package to nearly all people in the state. Although the shops do not offer credit during periods of greatest food shortage, through low prices they nonetheless help reduce the plight of the most potentially undernourished groups and help them remain free of private moneylenders whose practices are a source of exploitation and misery in many third world rural areas.

6. Devoting significant resources to public health and health care can bring about low infant mortality, high life expectancy, and low birth rates even when incomes are not high or increasing. Sanitation, safe water, housing, and regularly staffed and accessible health care facilities play a major role in reducing the incidence and effects of disease. Kerala proves there is no need to wait for economic growth before installing these crucial services even in the poorest parts of the world. Although some countries face greater costs in providing appropriate facilities, the rewards in terms of meeting basic needs and producing a population that can make use of other development programs is surely greater than the costs when measured against the cumulative benefits of health programs and other reforms.

7. Widespread literacy and expanding educational opportunities can help to break down traditional social barriers and create a more just and open social order. Despite widespread recognition of the need for education, many third world countries devote far too little to both basic literacy and raising the levels of education in rural areas. Illiterate people cannot compete for modern

employment and may be intimidated into fear and passivity in the face of bureaucracies that demand they fill in forms or display awareness of laws they cannot read. Education can give people confidence as well as skills.

8. Meaningful land reform can reduce economic and social-political inequality and put important productive resources into the hands of a large portion of the poor. Each agrarian society has its own particular land ownership structure and Kerala's experience can only be seen in the most general terms. The kind of land reform needed will vary, but to the extent that wealth and income are derived from land, only the breaking of the hold of the landed elite over productive resources can liberate the poorest small farmers from the effects of highly unequal land ownership.

9. Protection of farm workers through laws covering wages and working conditions can help to distribute more widely the existing resources of even a very poor economy. Many features of the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act would directly and immediately benefit millions of third world workers who would be left out of even the most thoroughgoing land reform. Mere passage of such laws will not ensure their enforcement, however, and would require organization and agitation as argued in lesson 2.

10. Greater social and economic equality combined with strong organizations representing the poorest groups can lead to lower levels of violence and a generally healthier social and political environment. The near absence of violence against lower castes in Kerala is one of the most valuable lessons the state has to offer other regions of India. Kerala's success in achieving peaceful intercaste relations may also be instructive in other parts of the third world where much routine violence is meted out to groups at the bottom of the society, even where no caste system is present.

11. Women can benefit substantially from radical reforms even when these are not aimed directly at their problems, but such

reforms must eventually be supplemented by special attention to women's needs. Land reform, education, health improvements, and the like, when widely distributed across all groups, are bound to help women in the process. Kerala's achievements for women show this. Each society, however, has its own special forms of gender oppression, and for Kerala, certain forms of violence and unemployment are still substantial problems. Kerala's militant organizations and leftist governing parties now face the difficult task of mobilizing support for types of reforms that have not been on the social agenda for very long.

12. **Progressive forces including Communists and Communist parties can play a major and positive role in bringing benefits of development to very poor third world farmers and workers.** Many people in the developed countries regard Communist organizers and Communist parties primarily as outside agents of the Soviet Union or some other antagonistic power. The stereotype of third world Communists in the United States is that they are corrupt puppets engaging in an international conspiracy against more "democratic" regimes. Members of the CPM in Kerala, the party currently in power along with its coalition partners, and the party with the widest or second-widest following, are independent of any other country. While they try to learn from the experiences of the socialist countries, they do not follow an agenda set in Moscow, Peking, or any other Communist capital. CPM leaders and cadres in Kerala have a reputation, even among their opponents, for being relatively honest and noncorrupt. This means they are not involved in politics for their own immediate political gains, but are trying to implement their vision of a more just society. Although communism and Communists are far more acceptable in Kerala than in the United States, there has been and could again be repression against them, including brutal beatings and killings. There are many risks and few material rewards for choosing the life of the radical organizer.

Communists in Kerala follow the electoral rules. They run candidates in elections, and when they win, they do not institute undemocratic practices such as censorship of the media or repression of their opponents. An election won by the CPM has not meant an end to the Kerala electoral process. When voted out of office, they have continued to play by the official rules of Indian democracy as spelled out in that country's constitution. Anticommunism is particularly strong in the United States. Kerala offers an excellent opportunity for us to rethink our outmoded and harmful approach. Kerala does not threaten perceived United States interests even in the wildest geopolitical imagination. Kerala's history and development experiment allow us to examine thoughtfully the role of Communist organizers and structures in bringing many of the very benefits that most Americans would favor to people who might not otherwise have been able to get them. Kerala dramatically suggests the need for a reevaluation of our ingrained hostility to Communists.

13. Radical reforms can shield the poor against recessions. As we were drafting this report, an international news item drew our attention to one of Kerala's most important lessons and one that is easily hidden from view. This is the *capacity of radical reforms to shield the poor from recessions*.

During the 1980s we in the United States have all witnessed the spectacle of feverish growth and collapse on the stock market, rising and falling interest rates, luxury living and homelessness. In the third world, the effects of the capitalist economic roller coaster have been far greater. Since 1983 the underdeveloped countries have transferred a net of over $30 billion in wealth to the already-rich countries. This antidevelopment flow of funds comes from the combination of interest payments on the staggering third world debt along with a decline in rich-country support for development efforts and a drop in the prices of the major goods sold by the third world.[158] Many countries have suffered zero or negative economic growth in the 1980s. These countries represent over 700 million

people, most of whom have seen their standards of living deteriorate. Of all the population groups, young children of poor parents are the most vulnerable to economic decline.[159] In Brazil, one study estimates that 60,000 "extra" child deaths occurred because of the recession of the 1980s.[160] In the third world generally, malnutrition is rising and more than 500,000 more children died in 1988 alone than might have been expected. War-related deaths are not included in the estimate.[161]

What do all these grim statistics have in common? They are all consequences of the market system, of capitalism's ability to provide a stunning array of products to those who can afford them, along with its dramatic *inability* to distribute resources and products equitably among the peoples of the world.

It is precisely this contradictory nature of capitalism and the market that Kerala's reforms help to overcome. Land redistribution, effective food rationing, pensions, and the like, insulate the poorest groups from the negative consequences of the capital business cycle, in particular, from dropping through the bottom during recessions. Certainly Kerala's people, like people everywhere, are affected by the world recession. But the reforms already in place give them protection that many others do not have. As we noted earlier in this report, the Left Front government elected in Kerala in 1987 has actually expanded access to school lunches and pensions. In addition, the government increased per capita expenditures on education by 16 percent in 1987 and 5 percent in 1988 and it increased expenditures on health by 20 percent in 1987 and 10 percent in 1988—thus continuing its tradition of expanding public services as the cornerstone of its development strategy.[162] While many third world governments are cutting education and medical services in order to make payments on their debts to rich country banks—including the World Bank, which is supposed to be supporting development—Kerala has structures and policies in place to buffer its people against the worst effects of this situation.

More importantly, Kerala's government, more so than most national or local governments in the third world, is directly responsible to political parties, labor unions, women's groups, and peasant associations that are militant, well organized, well led, and ready if necessary to go into action if their members' interests are threatened. Because of the strength of the people's organizations, many of the reforms are continued and expanded even under conservative governments, though they prosper more when leftist parties are in power.

At the press conference announcing its 1989 report, UNICEF Director James Grant stated: "In the 60s and 70s, tremendous emphasis was put on how you get better GNP growth rates. But GNP growth rates can hide mass maldistribution of income." He continued: "In the 90s, the target ought to be meeting more tangible human targets: assuring safe water, assuring access to health services, assuring basic education."[163]

Kerala State, India, he might have added, offers us lessons in how to meet the target.

NOTES

1. Some scholars prefer to derive the name from Chera, an ancient south Indian empire. Menon 1984:9.

2. Computed from GOK 1989:36.

3. World Bank 1988:222 and GOK 1986.

4. A brief overview of Dravidian culture in the context of general Indian history can be found in Wolpert 1982; more details in Sastri 1966.

5. Menon 1984:1–244.

6. Other adjustments included ceding of Tamil-speaking areas to the state of Tamil Nadu to the east and south of Kerala.

7. Details of Kerala's complicated and fragmented party structure are provided in Nossiter 1982; Nossiter 1988; and Sathyamurthy 1985.

8. Nossiter 1988.

9. GOK 1985:1.

10. Seligson 1984:38–88 gives a sampling of these approaches with a detailed bibliography.

11. The most influential study in this area is probably Schultz 1964. See also Mosher 1966 and 1969.

12. The classic paper is Kuznets 1955. A recent example from India is Westley 1986.

13. Streeten et al. 1981.

14. Webster 1984:34.

15. Lipton 1977, 1988.

16. Schumacher 1973; Webster 1984:169–187.

17. Seligson 1984:95–282 gives examples of dependency and world systems theory and critical responses to it.

18. Cereseto and Waitzkin 1988. The authors of this article contrasted one hundred capitalist countries with thirteen socialist countries and ten recent revolutionary countries grouped into five income categories on ten major development indicators.

19. Nossiter 1988:74–76.

20. Sathymaurthy 1986:183, 197, 238.

21. Sathymaurthy 1985:315; Nossiter 1982:258; Nossiter 1988:99.

22. Menon 1988:5.

23. Kannan 1988:24.

24. Mencher 1966a.

25. Menon 1984:45–53.

26. Wolf 1969.

27. Tharian and Tharakan 1986; Kannan 1988:51.

28. Two autobiographies of Kerala Communist leaders are Namboodiripad 1976 and Nayanar 1982. Both are from former high caste and very wealthy families and both could have led privileged lives had they not gone into radical politics. E. M. S. Namboodiripad, for example, sold his portion of his family's extensive land holdings upon receiving his inheritance in 1940 for the then phenomenal sum of 70,000 rupees and donated the money to establishing a publishing company for the workers' movement (1976:197). He has since led an economically austere life. Namboodiripad was the chief minister in 1957–1959 of the first elected Communist government in Kerala and is now the all-India leader of the Communist Party Marxist (CPI-M or CPM). Nayanar became chief minister of Kerala following the March 1987 electoral victory of the Left Democratic Front, led mainly by the CPM. The main outside history of the Kerala Communist movement is Nossiter 1982.

29. Personal communication from a participant.

30. UN 1975:41.

31. Sathyamurthy 1985:394. Seven other Indian states currently have school lunch programs, but Kerala's has been the most extensive and consistent in the country. Subbarao 1989:32.

32. UN 1975:43; GOK 1988:88.

33. UN 1975:41; GOK 1989:97.

34. Gwatkin 1979:248; Subbarao 1989: 25–26.

35. Sathyamurthy 1985:176.

36. Gwatkin 1979:249.

37. GOK 1989:15.

38. George 1971:181–187.

39. GOK 1988:17–19.

40. UN 1975:43,48.

41. Grant 1988:66.

42. Jeffery 1988:131; World Bank 1988, tables 7 and 29. The 2,400

minimum comes from the FAO as cited in UN 1975:31.

43. UN 1975, chapter 2.

44. Mencher 1980:1789; Panikar 1980.

45. Kumar and Stewart 1987:4; Mahadevan and Sumangala 1987:40.

46. A good summary of the current debate is contained in Messer 1986.

47. Cited in Kumar and Stewart 1987:3. Kerala reduced the rate of severe malnutrition from 4.8% in 1975–79, already the lowest of any Indian state, to 1.5% in 1982, ranking it second to West Bengal which achieved a rate of 0.0%. The third best state was Tamil Nadu with 5.2%. Kerala ranked first and way above all other states with 31.8% "normal" in weight for age by international standards in 1982. See Subbarao 1989:13.

48. Panikar and Soman 1984:65–70. Older children and teenagers, however, are shorter and smaller in Kerala than in most other states, but not enough to be statistically significant.

49. Panikar and Soman 1984:58. The precise definition of unfit is not given.

50. UN 1975:196; Panikar and Soman 1984:59; GOK 1988:81; ICSSR 1983:89–94.

51. Menon 1988:35.

52. Panikar and Soman 1984:50,123. We do not have comparable data for Cochin and Malabar, the other two major regions that combined with Travancore in 1956 to create Kerala State.

53. Grant 1988:68; Panikar and Soman 1984:60; GOK 1988:217–218; GOK 1989:89.

54. Kannan and Pushpangadan 1988:A125– A126.

55. Panikar and Soman 1984:49–50.

56. Panikar and Soman 1984:34; ICSSR 1983:103.

57. Panikar and Soman 1984:39; UN 1975:141–145; Grant 1989:82–89.

58. GOK 1985:13–14.

59. UN 1975:139.

60. GOK 1989:83; ICSSR 1983:108; Mahadevan and Sumangala 1987:36.

61. GOK 1989:122.

62. Mencher 1980; Basu 1986; Mahadevan and Sumangala 1987.

63. Krishnan 1976:1219; Rouyer 1987:463.

64. Nair 1974; Panikar 1975; Ratcliffe 1977:136.

65. Mahadevan and Sumangala 1987:39.

66. Rouyer (1987:463) found that 70 percent of the variance in birth rates among Indian states could be accounted for by these three factors combined.

67. Ratcliffe 1977:139. His suggestion of a role for declining opportunities for child labor has yet to be confirmed. The specific effects of the land reform on family size decisions have also to be demonstrated.

68. Zachariah 1983a:15.

69. Ratcliffe 1977:140. Emphasis in original. This approach is also described in Lappé and Schurman 1988.

70. Mencher 1980:1781–1782.

71. Cited in Nag 1989:418.

72. Nag 1989:418.

73. Mahadevan and Sumangala 1987:145–146.

74. Pillai 1981, 1984.

75. Nair 1983:4.

76. Nair 1983:10.

77. Nair 1983:17.

78. Nair 1983:28–33, 36, 71.

79. Nair 1983:43, 46, 72.

80. Kannan 1988:35–88.

81. Mencher 1966.

82. Isaac 1983.

83. Kannan 1988:127–134; Mahadevan and Sumangala 1987:36.

84. Sathyamurthy 1985:382–420.

85. Continuing conflict between church and secular state leftist governing parties is noted recently in the New York Times, 18 October 1988. p. 4.

86. Nair 1979:85–90.

87. Sathyamurthy 1985:409–411; Isaac and Ekbal 1988.

88. Nair 1983:106–109.

89. Jeffrey 1987.

90. Murickan 1975:73.

91. Nag 1989.

92. A detailed examination of each provision of the 1957 proposed act appears in Paulini 1979:241–252; of the 1963 watered down version, pp.

257–260 and 267–272; and of the eventual 1969 Kerala Land Reform Amendments (Act) that became the main land reform in practice, pp. 292–296.

93. UN 1975:65.

94. Cited in United Nations 1975:58; Herring 1983:161.

95. Namboodiripad 1984:77.

96. Herring 1980:A67; Mukherjee 1979:6–9.

97. Survey by Joan Mencher, which we analyzed for our village study to be published in the future.

98. UN 1975:71; Herring 1980:A60. Detailed reviews of the consequences in one village are given in Chasin 1988 and Franke 1988a.

99. Herring 1983:188–189.

100. Herring 1989.

101. Sathyamurthy 1985:146–150.

102. Sathyamurthy 1985:151–152; Miller 1976:147.

103. Kannan 1988:119.

104. Sathyamurthy 1985:152– 158,166,176.

105. Sathyamurthy 1985:225.

106. Herring 1983:180–216 details the intricate political, legal, and on-the-ground battles surrounding the culmination of the land reform act and its implementation.

107. Kannan 1988:10.

108. Kannan 1988:283.

109. Kannan 1988:258 and 263; UN 1975:87; Westley 1986:318. 1974 is the latest year for which we have been able to locate the appropriate comparative wage figures.

110. Computed from Kannan 1988:286.

111. Nossiter 1988:105; GOK 1988:89.

112. GOK 1989:98.

113. Rajeev 1983:58.

114. GOK 1988:12–13.

115. Mencher 1980:1783.

116. These data on traditional caste behaviors were derived from Fuller 1976, Iyer 1909, Mathew 1986, Mencher 1980a, and Unni 1959. Readers will recognize the effects of caste ideas on English language usage. We sometimes speak of a person being an "outcast" or a "pariah." The term

"pariah" is actually the (south Indian) Tamil word for one of the untouchable castes in the Madras region. North Americans sometimes also refer to members of the rich New England elite as "Boston Brahmins."

117. Iyer 1909 [1981]:122.

118. Mathew 1986:101–102; Saradamoni 1980:148.

119. Mathew 1986:104.

120. Jeffrey 1978:152–153.

121. Gough 1970:149.

122. Mencher 1980a:280.

123. GOK 1988:89; 1989:99.

124. Mathew 1986:106.

125. Mathew 1986:140.

126. GOK 1988:90; 1989:99.

127. GOK 1989:99.

128. Mathew 1986:146.

129. Sivanandan 1976 and 1979.

130. Gough 1970.

131. Joshi 1986:2.

132. Joshi 1986:2; See also Cultural Survival 1989.

133. Joshi 1986:137.

134. Nossiter 1988:191.

135. Charlton 1984; ISIS 1984; Mukhopadhyay 1984; Nelson 1979; Rogers 1980; Sen and Grown 1987. The special problems of women agricultural laborers in Kerala have been discussed in detail by Mencher 1980 and 1982; Mencher and Saradamoni 1982; and Saradamoni 1982 and 1983. Additional research on women in Kerala appears in Gulati 1984.

136. Miller 1981, 1982; Harris and Ross 1987.

137. Charlton 1984:36; Das Gupta 1987; Agarwal 1986:170–180.

138. GOK 1987:73; See also Saradamoni 1981:41–43.

139. Murickan 1975:72.

140. GOK 1984:93–95; Murickan 1975:77.

141. Calculated from GOK 1984:85.

142. Mencher and Saradamoni 1982:153.

143. Jain, Sing, and Chand 1982:8. P. M. Mathew 1986 gives a detailed

picture of the process for Kerala.

144. Mencher 1966; Namboodiripad 1976:92–104.

145. Gough 1961; Fuller 1976.

146. Saradamoni 1983:52.

147. Menon 1984:329–331 lists the acts and their dates. Jeffrey 1976 details the breakup of Nair taravads in Travancore.

148. Mies 1980:88–89; Mencher 1962.

149. *Indian Express*, 5 April 1987; see also Visvanathan 1989.

150. *New York Times*, 15 January 1989, p. 4.

151. Ibid.

152. ICSSR 1983:162 and 211.

153. Murickan 1975:84.

154. Liddle & Joshi 1986:137–141 give all-India examples of women's restricted mobility.

155. Kannan 1988:260–262.

156. This point has been forcefully argued in Mencher 1980.

157. Menon 1987:5, 8–11.

158. Grant 1988:28–29.

159. Grant 1988:25.

160. Grant 1988:28.

161. *New York Times*, 20 December 1988, p. 1; Grant 1989:1.

162. GOK 1988:7, 75; 1989:81, 87.

163. *New York Times*, 20 December 1988, p. 6.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. We gathered some of the information for this introduction during a December 1992-January 1993 visit to Kerala. We acknowledge travel funding from the Montclair State University Global Education Committee and the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

2. Franke 1993:197.

3. Franke 1993a:360.

4. GOK 1994:50.

5. Howes and Jha 1992; Mooij 1994, especially pages 123-124.

6. Mooij 1994:119.

7. Geetha and Suryanaraya 1993:2207.

8. GOK 1994:21. Kerala model critic K. K. George (1993) argues that the state is spending too much of its potential development investment resources on subsidies for consumption. M. A. Oomen (1993:208) takes a similar position.

9. Franke 1993:219-221; cf Franke 1993a

10. Soman 1992:86; Kumar 1993a.

11. Soman 1992:86.

12. We computed the 1990 figures from George and Nandraj 1993:1673 and 1674. India overall had 70 hospital beds per 100,000 in 1990, showing the high urban bias outside Kerala (World Bank 1993:208). Various sources report widely ranging figures on hospital beds per 100,000 depending on whether they refer to rural, rural and urban, private or private and government combined.

13. *India Abroad* 13 December 1991, page 32.

14. We could not locate a Kerala state figure, but for all-India, 88% of pregnant women are anemic. This means they have a hemoglobin level of below 110 grams per liter of blood (World Bank 1993:197 and 204). India's figure is the highest of any country for which data are presented.

15. K. C. Zachariah 1992:III-41.

16. Rajan and James 1993:1890.

17. K. C. Zachariah 1992:III-43.

18. GOK 1994:119 and World Bank 1993:208.

19. Kumar 1993:108; Kannan et al 1991.

20. quoted in Kumar 1993:115-116; see also Rajan and James 1993.

21. Kumar 1993:116 citing Murray and Chen.

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22. Kannan et al 1991.

23. Mencher 1991.

24. Mari Bhat and Rajan 1990; K. C. Zachariah 1992.

25. Franke 1993:237-239.

26. K. C. Zachariah 1992:IV-3.

27. K. C. Zachariah 1992:V-1.

28. Bose 1991:67. This book, pages 12 and 48, gives the 1981 female literacy as 66%. The reason for the discrepancy is that the Indian literacy statistics were recently revised to reflect only persons over age 7. In the text of this introduction we use the two figures that are appropriate to compare to each other.

29. Gulati 1990:341.

30. GOK 1990:111.

31. Franke 1993:180-183.

32. Franke 1993:192. In 1993, the number of agricultural labor pensions rose to 341,000 (GOK 1994:144).

33. Pillai 1992:68.

34. Pillai 1992:80.

35. Pillai 1992:76 and 78.

36. GOK 1993:120.

37. Pillai 1992:67.

38. S. Guhan 1993:1802.

39. Pillai 1992:80.

40. Premi 1991:44-45; Nath 1991:2149.

41. Kumar 1989:519 and 524.

42. Oldenburg 1992:2660.

43. Cited in Harris (1981:134) In 1989, the most recent year for which we could obtain crime statistics, Kerala had 524 murders, about 1.5% of India's total of 34,844 murders for that year (NCRB 1991:183). This puts Kerala's rate at just below half its percent of India's population.

44. K. C. Zachariah 1992:VIII-18.

45. K. C. Zachariah 1992:VIII-11 and 12.

46. K. C. Zachariah 1992:VIII-4 to 8.

47. Gargan 1993.

48. NCRB 1991:183.

49. This problem is compounded by Kerala's high unemployment. It is further compounded by the statistical effects of the practice of men marrying

women about 5 years their junior. This is explained in detail in Billig 1992.

50. K. C. Zachariah 1992:VII-4.

51. See Billig 1992:210.

52. Jeffrey 1993:273 and 1994:549.

53. Jeffrey 1993:217.

54. Jeffrey 1993:218.

55. Computed from Isaac 1992:24.

56. Franke 1993:165.

57. Franke 1993:266-272.

58. Isaac 1992:32.

59. Isaac 1992.

60. Isaac 1992:21.

61. Isaac 1992:39. The 45% figure includes Iraqi produced oil and oil from the former USSR that came through Iraqi pipelines also closed to India by the embargo.

62. Introductions to the Ayodhya crisis and its aftermath, appear in Bidwai, Praful, Democracy at risk in India, *The Nation*, January 25, 1993, pages 84-88 and Gopal Sarvepalli, editor, *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India*. London: Zed Press. *The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25(4), 1993, is devoted entirely to aspects of the Ayodhya crisis with special emphasis on the role of women in Hindu extremism and among its opponents. The horror of the Bombay killings and the role of the police appear in many Indian newspaper accounts and are summarized in Gargan, Edward A. 1993. Trust is torn: police role in Bombay riots. *The New York Times* 4 February 1993.

63. Nair, C. 1992:122.

64. *Indian Express* 2 January 1993.

65. *Indian Express* 25 December 1993.

66. Elections in several central and northern states in November 1993 also indicate declining support for Hindu religious parties and a concomitant belief among the poorest Indians that their interests lie with socialist and reform-oriented parties.

67. See especially pages 7, 26-27, 61, 84-85 and 104 of this book. A detailed analysis of the 1991 elections and the general record of the 1987-1991 LDF ministry appears in Isaac and Mohana (1991). The authors of that article—veteran LDF activists—suggest the parallel with the 1957 ministry.

68. The KSSP is described in Isaac and Franke (1994) and Zachariah and Sooryamoorthy (1994).

69. Tharakan 1990:50

70. Gupta 1991:77. *The New York Times* missed the story. Their account (Crossette 1990) makes the literacy program appear to be the brainchild of Ernakulam District Collector K. R Rajan. While Rajan deserves much credit for his active support of the campaign, KSSP is the true creating and implementing organization.

71. Gupta 1991:80. K. K. George (1993:129) suggests that Kerala use its widespread literacy and educational facilities to "be a pioneer in the 'Postmodern' skill and knowledge intensive industries." This would be a different kind of new Kerala model.

72. Centre for Science and Environment 1982:149.

73. Centre for Science and Environment 1985:123. Isaac and Franke (1994) cite other studies showing additional harmful effects of breathing the smoke from cooking fires.

74. Isaac and Franke 1994 provide more details on this program.

75. Unnikrishnan 1992.

76. Chattopadhyay, Srikumar et al. 1991.

77. Gangadharan 1993.

78. Bello 1994:68.

79. Bello 1994; Nash 1994.

80. Bello 1994:2.

81. UNDP 1992:1, 36, and 98.

82. UNDP 1992:7.

83. World Bank 1993:238 and 276-277.

84. Wimberley 1991:406.

85. Wimberley 1991:419.

86. Nash 1994:7.

87. Kaplan 1994.

88. Attali 1991:84.

89. Attali 1991:73-75 and 12.

90. Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf 1990:223. *Business Week* has also discovered the harmful effects of inequality on the U.S. economy. Their cover story (15 August 1994) summarizes several recent studies showing that job growth in U.S. cities is greater where levels of inequality are lower.

91. *The New York Times*, 8 January 1994:A39.

92. French 1994:158.

93. World Bank 1993:210.

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